DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 293 082 CG 020 730

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Hurst, Hunter, Ed.; And Others |
| TITLE | Family. |
| INSTITUTION | National Center for Juvenile Justice, Pittsburgh, Pa. |
| REPORT NO | ISBN-0-910099-07-3 |
| PUB DATE | Dec 85 |
| NOTE | 99p.; For related volumes, see CG 020 728-729 and CG 020 731. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | National Center for Juvenile Justice, 701 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15219 ($10.00). |
| PUB TYPE | Collected Works - Serials (022) |
| JOURNAL CIT | Today's Delinquent; v4 Dec 1985 |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS. |
| DESCRIPTORS | *Delinquency; *Delinquency Causes; Delinquent Rehabilitation; *Family Influence; *Family Role; *Youth Problems |

ABSTRACT

This document contains the fourth volume of "Today's Delinquent," an annual publication of the National Center for Juvenile Justice. This volume deals with the issue of the family and delinquency. "The Family and Delinquency" (LaMar T. Empey) systematically reviews and weighs the evidence to support prominent theories on the origins of delinquency, with special attention to the role of the family in delinquency causation and control. "The Family and Delinquency: A Judicial Perspective" (Maurice B. Cohill, Jr.) sees the school as a pivotal element in delinquency prevention and the only hope for those who have already been identified as delinquent, citing less optimism about the resilience of parents of delinquent children. "The Family and Delinquency: A Critique" (Judith Cassetty) endorses the notion of family strength, but sees little hope of actualizing family influences to control delinquency unless something is done about the inequitable distribution of resources and the increasing birth rate among teenagers from impoverished families. "The Family as an Adaptable and Enduring Social Unit: A Case for Assessing Delinquent Behavior from a Family Systems Perspective" (Leah S. Taylor) advances the view that families usually possess strengths that can be mobilized to mitigate delinquent behavior. (NB)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

# TODAY'S DELINQUENT

VOLUME 4, 1985

ED293082

CG 020730

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Hunter Hurst

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

**TODAY'S DELINQUENT, Volume 4, 1985.**
**National Center for Juvenile Justice.**

*Hunter Hurst, Editor-in-Chief; Richard J. Gable, Social Research Editor; Linda A. Szymanski, Law Editor; Howard N. Snyder, Systems Research Editor; Patricia McFall Torbet, Managing Editor; Ellen H. Nimick, Production Editor; Bernadette K. Magnus and Mary Ann Peters, Copy Editors; Nancy J. Tierney, Production Assistant.*

*Editorial Office: TODAY'S DELINQUENT, National Center for Juvenile Justice, 701 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 15219.*

*TODAY'S DELINQUENT is published annually by the National Center for Juvenile Justice, the research division of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Inc., Reno, Nevada. This publication is made possible through the support of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania. Points of view or opinions expressed in this document are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Center, the Council or the Masons.*

*Subscription is $10.00. All subscription and change of address information must be sent in writing to TODAY'S DELINQUENT, National Center for Juvenile Justice, 701 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15219. (412) 227-6950.*

*Copyright, December, 1985, National Center for Juvenile Justice, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.*

ISSN 0733-6551
ISBN 0-910099-07-3

*Design by Vincent Dzierski, Town Studios, Inc., Pittsburgh, PA*

# TODAY'S DELINQUENT

National Center for Juvenile Justice
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

## Table of Contents

TODAY'S DELINQUENT


3 **FOREWORD**

4 **PREFACE**

LaMar T. Empey 5 **THE FAMILY AND DELINQUENCY**

Maurice B. Cohill, Jr. 47 **THE FAMILY AND DELINQUENCY:** A Judicial Perspective

Judith Cassetty 55 **THE FAMILY AND DELINQUENCY:** A Critique

Leah S. Taylor 69 **THE FAMILY AS AN ADAPTABLE AND ENDURING SOCIAL UNIT:** A Case for Assessing Delinquent Behavior from a Family Systems Perspective

**Notes on Contributors**

## Foreword

We are pleased to present Volume 4 of Today's Delinquent. The subject matter of this issue is the family and delinquency.

Carl W. Stenberg, Jr.
*Right Worshipful Grand Master*
*Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania*

Arthur J. Kurtz
*Right Worshipful Deputy Grand Master*

Hiram P. Ball
*Right Worshipful Past Grand Master*
*Chairman, Pennsylvania Foundation for Drug and Alcohol Abuse Among Children*

Samuel C. Williamson
*Right Worshipful Past Grand Master*
*Chairman, Committee on Youth Activities, Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania*

Honorable John M. Yeaman
*President, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges*

Honorable Maurice B. Cohill, Jr.
*Chairman, Board of Fellows, National Center for Juvenile Justice*
*Beta-Duquesne Lodge No. 546*

## Preface

The family—from the Middle Ages to the present, from state-sanctioned man and wife to blended families to single parents of tender years—and theories of delinquency causation—from Lombroso to Freud to Sutherland to Hirschi—are the subject matter of this issue of *Today's Delinquent.*

LaMar Empey systematically reviews and weighs the evidence to support prominent theories on the origins of delinquency, with special attention to the role of family in delinquency causation and control. Empey also shares his view of what conditions must exist to produce less criminal behavior by juveniles. His proposals for prevention policy are thought-provoking, though not completely embraced by the authors who responded to his article.

Maurice B. Cohill, Jr., writing from his vantage as a judge, sees the school as a pivotal element in delinquency prevention, and virtually the only hope for correcting the behavior of those who have already been identified as delinquent. Cohill is less optimistic about the resilience of parents of delinquent children.

Conversely, Leah Taylor advances the view that families —no matter what their form—usually possess strengths that can be mobilized to mitigate delinquent behavior, if only one knows where and how to find the strengths.

Judith Cassetty, while endorsing the notion of family strength, paints a bleak picture for any hope of actualizing family influences to control delinquency unless we first do something about the inequitable distribution of resources and the galloping birth rate among teenage females from impoverished families.

Readers who wish to increase their understanding of the role of the family in delinquency causation and control will find this issue of *Today's Delinquent* a useful addition to their knowledge base.

*Hunter Hurst*

# The Family and Delinquency

*LaMar T. Empey*

All too often, **one issue preoccupies debates** over the relationship of the family to delinquency—namely, **whether broken or disaffected families cause delinquent behavior.** However, history and research reveal that this preoccupation is far too narrow. The traditions and practices that govern both the family and delinquency are changing social constructions comprised not only of current conceptions of appropriate family life but also of the political, economic, and social forces that actually determine whether ideals for the family and for justice can be realized.

For example, we might ask, if the juvenile court was created to remedy the lives of wayward youth and their depraved families, why was it not invented until the turn of the 20th century? How did our ancestors get along without it? Likewise, if "adolescence" and "delinquency" have always reflected some kind of universal stress among the young, why did they not become matters of great concern until late in the 19th century? Could it be that parents suddenly became more uncaring and youth more evil? Or could it be that significant changes occurred in expectations for parents and their offspring? As a matter of fact, history suggests that it is the latter.

## History of Childhood

During the Middle Ages, the **deliberate killing or abandonment of unwanted children was as common as abortion is today.** Moreover, these practices did not decrease significantly until the 17th century (Marvick, 1974; Mause, 1974). Likewise, until the 17th and 18th centuries, most families lived in extended rather than nuclear households and were not expected to exhibit undying devotion to their offspring (Laslett, 1962). Instead, the preponderant majority of all children, including those of the nobility, did not go

to school and could not read and write. Rather, they were sent at an early age—at age seven in the Middle Ages and around 12 or 13 in Colonial America—to live with others, as apprentices or indentured servants (Aries, 1962; Bremner, 1970; Gillis, 1974). And, in these subservient positions, **children were often subjected to sexual, economic, and other kinds of exploitation** (Mause, 1974).

Finally, there was early death. When this country was still in its struggle for independence, from one-half to two-thirds of all children died before the age of 20 (Gillis, 1974; Kessen, 1965). The same was true in Europe. **"Before they are old enough to bother you," said one Frenchman, "you will have lost half of them,** or perhaps all of them" (Aries, 1962). Equally important, a life expectancy that averaged only 30 years meant that many children who did survive infancy could not expect to live through their teen years with even one, to say nothing of both, parents. As a consequence, childhood was not as vital a phase in the life cycle as it is today.

Many languages lacked words to distinguish babies from those we now call adolescents and far fewer young people were shielded from adult strength, depravity, work, sex, or death. "Indeed," says one historian, "the cruel truth may be that most parents in history have not been much involved with their children and have not cared much about them" (Stone, 1974). At least by 20th century standards, parents were relatively detached from, if not indifferent to, their offspring.

## Delinquency in the 19th Century

Contemporary moral standards for parents and children began developing in the 17th and 18th centuries. While these standards were primarily those of the propertied classes, they did not reach full flower until early in the 19th century (Aries, 1962; Bremner, 1970).

**Rather than attributing poverty, deviance, and child neglect to the Devil,** or to predestination, as they had in the 18th century,

established **Americans looked at waves of new immigrants, at growing communities, at poverty, and at different religious practices and concluded that these were due to community corruption and depraved families** (Rothman, 1971). "Those parents," said the aristocratic Board of Managers of the Philadelphia House of Refuge, "whose extreme poverty, casual calamity, or moral turpitude induce a neglect of their offspring, expose them at once to be caught up by the profligate and knavish, to be made unsuspecting agents in the commission of offenses, and to be trained into habits of idleness, cunning, and predatory vagrancy" (Sanders, 1970). Indeed, David Rothman (1971) contends that 19th century Americans became so sensitive to the problems of child-raising that "they stripped away the years from adults and made everyone into a child." They reasoned that the typical road to crime was paved, first, by a lack of family discipline and rudeness, then by drinking and intemperance and, finally, by lawbreaking itself.

*The Institutional Panacea*

In many ways, this tendency to blame "depraved" parents and "pestiferous" juveniles for society's problems was but a symptom of unparalleled urban growth, rapid change, and social disorganization. For example, there were only 1.25 million people in this country in 1750. But by 1850, the figure had reached over 23 million, an incredible increase. Between 1790 and 1830, alone, the population of Massachusetts doubled, Pennsylvania tripled, and New York increased five-fold (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1955). Thus, besides blaming degenerate families, older Americans might well have sought to deal directly with the consequences of these events. But instead, community leaders focused almost exclusively on the characteristics of illiterate and poor families and concluded that asylums and houses of refuge should be constructed to house those of their children who were running the streets and begging for food. Such institutions, they reasoned, "would reinforce

the crumbling authority of impoverished parents..., giving them a potent symbol of fear with which to scare their ungracious and disobedient children into quiescence" (Schlossman, 1977).

It was not long, however, before **these much-heralded parental surrogates had proven to be dismal failures**—overcrowded, insensitive, and even brutal warehouses whose young inhabitants either marched, thought, and acted like robots, or who became more criminal than before (Bremner, 1970; Rothman, 1971). Yet, even after a half-century of failure, the famous Cincinnati Prison Congress of 1870 concluded that the inadequacies of institutions lay in poor execution rather than in basic concept. Their goals rather than their methods were at fault. Consequently, after the Civil War, new generations of reformers simply added new variations to the same basic theme—industrial schools for destitute, neglected, and disobedient children, and reformatories for young criminals (Henderson, 1910).

**The industrial schools would be used to hold marginal children for as long as it took to save them.** For example, consider that which was prescribed for the "giddy" and potentially deviant female:

> **"When she reaches the age of 14 or 15,** she becomes restless, uneasy, discontented. She chafes under restraint, desires more liberty, wants to choose her own association and recreations. **She wants to go out at night. She craves pretty clothes and admiration.** Perhaps she is the recipient of flattering and dangerous attentions from some young man.... The girl is not vicious, she does not want to do anything wrong, but she is in a critical and dangerous position. She is giddy, headstrong, easily influenced. She needs to be kept safe for a few years or two, until she comes to herself, and in the meantime she ought to receive such training as will make her a more efficient housewife and mother. It is for this class of girls that [industrial] schools are now demanded" (Hart, 1910).

The new reformatory, by contrast, would be more stern, even though it, too, would make use of "scientific" principles: a marking system by which offenders could be classified into different categories of dangerousness; **an indeterminate sentence that would allow officials to keep delinquents until they were reformed;** a strict regimen of education, hard work, military drill, and strenuous physical exercise; and supervised parole upon release to the community (Brockway, 1910).

What was emerging, of course, was the concept of rehabilitation—the idea that deep-seated problems could be eliminated by treating the individual. Even more important, this concept was but one among many in the late 19th century that was concerned with improving family life and enhancing the lives of children. The new view of childhood that had now reached full flower obligated society to insure a novel set of rights for children: the personal obligation of parents to nurture their own children and to see that they had adequate food, shelter, and clothing. Meanwhile, the state would protect them from economic exploitation and would require that they receive a secular as well as moral education.

*Invention of the Juvenile Court*

But when it was found, at the turn of the 20th century, that many children were still being exploited in mines and mills, on farms, in jails, or even in the courts, the most significant invention of all was conceived—a *juvenile* court. **Nothing less than a new societal superparent,** this court would have the power to intervene in the lives of parents and children, not merely as a criminal tribunal but as a civil tribunal concerned with neglect, immorality, and dependency.

There were some experts, of course, who questioned the constitutionality of any legal body so broadly conceived, but they were buried by a burst of unquenchable enthusiasm (Lathrop, 1925). The juvenile court, said Roscoe Pound, is **"the greatest step forward in Anglo-American jurisprudence since the**

**Magna Carta!"** (National Probation and Parole Association, 1957).

The new court would be "liberally construed to the end...that the care, custody, and discipline of a child shall approximate...that which should be given by its parents" (Revised Statutes of Illinois, 1899, Sec. 21). Indeed, if the initial statutes are any guide, it would have been an imaginative and well-informed parent who could have kept track of all the demands now imposed by statute. For instance, consider that the South Dakota law which was based on the original Illinois model was not revised until 1968.

On the one hand, all criminality was covered in part of a sentence. A delinquent was "any child who, while under the age of 18 years, violates any law of this state or any ordinance of any city or town of this state...."

On the other hand, the additional list of constraints imposed on children was not only of incredible length but can be viewed as listing, in obverse, the characteristics of the ideal child. A delinquent was any child:

> "who is incorrigible, or intractable by parents, guardian, custodian; who knowingly associates with thieves, vicious, or immoral persons; who, without cause and without the consent of its parents, guardian, or custodian, absents itself from its home or place of abode; who is growing up in idleness or crime; who fails to attend school regularly without proper reason therefore, if of compulsory school age; who repeatedly plays truant from school; who does not regularly attend school and is not otherwise engaged in any regular occupation or employment but loiters and idles away its time; who knowingly frequents or visits a house of ill repute; who knowingly frequents or visits any policy shop or place where a gaming device is operated; who patronizes, visits, or frequents any saloon or dram shop where intoxicating liquors are sold; who patronizes or visits any public poolroom where the game of billiards or pool is being carried on for pay or hire; who frequents or patronizes any wineroom or dance hall run in connection with or

adjacent to any house of ill fame or saloon; who visits, frequents, or patronizes, with one of the opposite sex, any restaurant or other place where liquors may be purchased at night after the hours of nine o'clock; who is found alone with one of the opposite sex in a private apartment or room of any restaurant, lodging house, hotel, or other place at nighttime or who goes to any secluded place or is found alone in such place with one of the opposite sex at nighttime with the evident purpose of concealing their acts; who wanders about the streets in the nighttime without being on any lawful business or lawful occupation, or habitually wanders about any railroad yards or tracks, or jumps, or attempts to jump, onto any moving train, or enters any car or engine without lawful authority; who writes or uses vile, obscene, vulgar, or indecent language, or smokes cigarettes or uses tobacco in any form; who drinks intoxicating liquors on any street, in any public place, or about any school house, or at any place other than its own home; or who is guilty of indecent, immoral, or lascivious conduct" (Rubin, 1974).

Such a statute is instructive because it reveals just how much our expectations for children have changed in a few short years. **No wonder Huck Finn and Thomas Sawyer were in constant trouble.** Had they been born just a few years later, they could not have made it through adolescence without being imprisoned and defined as habitual recidivists. They were not submissive to authority. They were not obedient. **They were not good students. They were not circumspect in habit and language. They were lazy. They stayed out late, used tobacco, wandered about the country, and played on dangerous things like rafts and steamboats.** In fact, if we knew whether they drank or ever managed to get alone with a person of the opposite sex at night, they might have been even more dangerous.

More to the point, if an astute probation officer or a dedicated psychiatrist, psychologist, or sociologist

wished to establish a scientific relationship between Tom's and Huck's delinquency and their family life, he should not have had much trouble, since Tom lived with his Aunt and Huck's father was a drunkard and a child beater. Hence, if this is the level of analysis we still wish to pursue, the much-sought relationship can be confirmed. By definition, family relationships and "delinquency" went hand-in-hand. Existing statutes assured us of a self-fulfilling prophecy. **Scientific research would triumph.**

## Twentieth Century Delinquency

As luck would have it, however, this reproach on the family was but a mild beginning. During the first third of this century, biologists convinced many legislators, judges, and reformatory superintendents that delinquency was the result of even more deep-seated problems, namely, genetically defective parents. **Lawbreaking was due to poor heredity, moral degeneracy, and mental and physical inferiority** (Lombroso, 1911, 1920; Goddard, 1914, 1921; Goring, 1913; Hooton, 1931, 1939). **Consequently, stern measures were required if the nation was not to be engulfed by these degenerates.** As Ernest Hooton (1939), a Harvard anthropologist, put it, "the elimination of crime can be effected only by the **extirpation of the physically and morally unfit,** or by their complete segregation in a socially aseptic environment."

Perhaps it is to the credit of Americans that they could stomach neither the outright "extirpation" of criminals, most of whom were young, nor the cost of segregating them permanently in prisons. But they did choose a drastic alternative nonetheless. Between 1907 and 1937, 31 states passed laws permitting the sterilization of the feebleminded, the mentally ill, "hereditary criminals," "moral degenerates," and epileptics. In fact, as late as 1973, 21 states still retained such laws (McCaghy, 1976; Kittre, 1973).

But since these laws probably had far greater impact on lower-class than middle-class families, it was another body of theory that tended to terrorize the latter, Freudian theory. **"The primitive, savage, and evil impulses of mankind," Freud wrote, "have not vanished in any individual,** but continue their existence, although in a repressed state" (Freud, 1963). All children, not just delinquents, are born with ample capacity to be bad. Left alone, they will exploit their neighbor, "use him sexually without his consent, seize his possessions, humiliate him, cause him pain, torture and kill him" (Hughes, 1961).

More relevant, though, was Freud's contention that, **by the age of five, all of the essential features of a child's adult personality will have been determined by how his parents train him, not merely by instinct.** If they are able to enhance the child's conscious mind (his *ego*) and to cultivate his conscience (his *superego*) so that these dominate his antisocial instincts (his *id*), they will have been a success. But woe unto the parents who fail. If they do not socialize their child properly, delinquency in one of several forms will result: a neurotic, compulsive need for punishment, because the child feels intolerably guilty over some unconscious, but socially unacceptable drive, such as a boy's incestuous craving for sex with his mother; psychopathic (guiltless, affectionless, aggressive, and amoral) behavior that is still present because his parents have not helped him to internalize any standard of moral conduct; lawbreaking that is due to parental failure to instill society's values as well as their own; and, finally, behavior that represents a search for gratifications that were withheld from him in infancy—excessive drinking in order to satisfy an oral craving for his mother's breast, or sadism because of poor toilet training (Feldman, 1969).

Meanwhile, female delinquency was of another order, though no less the fault of parents. Freud argued that **because females are destined by nature**

**to be wives and mothers rather than captains of industry or even heads of the Mafia, any delinquency on their part will be due to penis envy,** a fruitless striving to emulate their fathers rather than their mothers. The reason is because the sex organs of the female are obviously inferior. In fact, "women become mothers trying to replace the lost penis" (Klein, 1973). Thus, if parents do not train their daughters to overcome their penis envy, they will behave in masculine ways, and masculinity in girls is synonymous with being delinquent (Simon, 1975). Indeed, "the deviant woman is one who is attempting to be a *man*" (Klein, 1973).

It is obvious, of course, that the average American did not pick up on these ideas by perusing the *Reader's Digest*. Nevertheless, many of them seeped into the American consciousness in other ways. Such key concepts as the "unconscious," "ego," "superego," "neuroticism," or "repression" became bywords in the lexicon of fashionable language. Likewise, Freud's preoccupation with childhood was but a reflection of a set of middle class concerns that had been emerging for decades. **Not only was the formulation of his theory coincident with the disappearance of the apprenticeship system for raising children, but it came at a time when a growing urban populace found itself increasingly cut off from extended family ties and isolated in small, emotionally packed, family units. Never before had parents and children been left so completely on their own resources, nor in a situation where they, alone, could be blamed when things went wrong** (Laslett, 1973).

Equally important, Freudian theory found a rich seedbed in the clinical philosophy of the juvenile court. Many authorities had already been enchanted by Judge Harvey Baker of Boston when, in 1910, he contended that the procedures of the juvenile court should be like

those of the medical clinic. The judge and the probation officer should first be diagnosticians and, then, finding the roots of the problem, administer a cure (Baker, 1910). Thus, the Freudian notion that delinquent behavior is an unconscious, involuntary response to a combination of antisocial instincts and parental training rather than deliberate defiance of social norms helped to legitimize the ideology of the court. **Delinquents are sick, not wicked. Their acts are only symptoms of the disease.**

Since this sickness required psychological treatment, those who worked with delinquents should be trained professionals. Ironically, schools of social work which had traced their origins to 19th century muckrakers and settlement workers now assumed an identity suggested by Freudian psychology. **Along with psychologists and psychiatrists, social workers would administer therapy.** Furthermore, these changes led not only to individualized treatment for the delinquent, but also to a child guidance movement in the 1950's that was supposed to neutralize the presence of "latent delinquency" in young children—children whose parents were still in the process of failing. Though such efforts stirred up much controversy, **considerable enthusiasm was generated over the idea that the latent carriers of delinquency might be identified at an early age and steps taken to cure them** (Banay, 1948; Craig and Glick, 1963; Hakeem, 1957).

In short, the treatment model Freudian theory suggested and later elaborations of it became the standard to which many courts and correctional agencies aspired until recently. Its popularity was unparalleled as a professional ideology for the proper treatment of children. Furthermore, long-standing beliefs about the importance of the family did little to weaken this popularity. Most experts and lay persons were convinced that poor parenting and divorce were threats to the very foundations of society, to say nothing of the threat posed by delinquent boys and girls.

## Rise of Sociological Theories

**Beginning in the 1930's, a number of criminologists, most of whom were sociologists, began to question both Freudian theory and the older, more commonplace, assumptions about the family.** In part, this questioning was ideological. But sociologists were also concerned with the role of the larger societal context and its contributions to family ills and to delinquency (Wilkinson, 1974).

### *Cultural Deviance Theory*

Between 1920 and 1966, two Chicago-based sociologists, Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (1931, 1942, 1969), collected a massive body of data on the demographic characteristics and ecological dispersion of thousands of official delinquents in Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Richmond. In contrast to prevailing beliefs, they found that: (1) official delinquents are highly concentrated in the most dilapidated, most poverty stricken, and least desirable areas of the city; (2) these high delinquency areas are characterized by physical deterioration, loss of population, economic and racial segregation, and a high incidence of infant mortality, mental disease, truancy, suicide, physical disorders, and crime; and (3) high delinquency rates in these areas are not a simple function of the depraved families of minority groups—white, Hispanic, or black.

**Earlier in our history, Irish, Italian, Polish, and other white groups inhabited the slums, while in more recent times, their major residents have been black and Hispanic. Yet, the crime rates in these areas remained about the same, as group after different group passed through them.** As a result, Shaw and McKay concluded that the explanation for delinquency must lie in the kinds of community life that slum areas produce rather than the kinds of parents and children who inhabit them. Indeed,

they constructed a theory which treated the destructive impact of ghetto areas on family life as but one among many other factors:

1. The deteriorated areas of the city produce social disorganization. There is an almost total absence of a sense of community in slum areas; instead, they produce socially disorganized neighborhoods (Shaw, et al., 1929; Shaw and McKay, 1969).
2. Socially disorganized neighborhoods lead to a lack of social control over children. Children who grow up in disorganized neighborhoods have little access to either a common set of community standards or the cultural heritage of the larger society. Hence, parents are relatively helpless in trying to control or to help them (Shaw, 1931).
3. Loss of social control encourages the development of street gangs. Shaw and McKay (1969) found that approximately eight out of ten delinquent acts are committed in groups. Thus, they concluded that a boy's delinquent acts are often identical with the traditions and practices of that group.
4. Delinquent traditions are transmitted from one generation of gang boys to the next. This transmission occurs in much the same way that language and other social phenomena are transmitted (Shaw and McKay, 1931).
5. **Delinquent traditions produce high delinquency rates.** Rather than seeing delinquents as inherently evil people as Freud had, Shaw and McKay tended to view them as basically social persons whose response to parental and neighborhood demoralization is the development of new organizational arrangements whose norms happen to be delinquent according to the traditions of the larger society (Kobrin, 1971).

At the same time, Shaw and McKay were not ivory tower theorists. Instead, for over 50 years one or both were involved in the Chicago Area Project which had three goals: (1) to induce the parents in slum areas to take up the cause of delinquency prevention; (2) to assist them in gaining greater influence over their children by

organizing local programs and resources; and (3) to foster cooperative action among families, schools, recreational centers, the police, and other agents of social control. **Rather than administering therapy to delinquents one by one, demoralized neighborhoods should be recreated** and made into more effective units for socializing and controlling the young (Kobrin, 1959, 1971).

*Differential Association*

**No less influential was the theory which Edwin H. Sutherland advanced in 1939.** Sutherland was an even more vigorous opponent of biological and Freudian explanations for crime (Sutherland, 1956). Along with his student, Donald R. Cressey, Sutherland agreed with Shaw and McKay that delinquents are not inherently evil. Rather, **crime is learned in intimate personal groups, like any other learning** (Sutherland and Cressey, 1955).

This learning includes not only techniques for committing illegal acts, but also the specific motives, rationalizations, and attitudes that make them possible. These motives and rationalizations define the legal codes as favorable or unfavorable and when there is an excess of definitions favorable to law violation, the individual will become delinquent. **But while Sutherland placed poverty and demoralized families in a secondary role, he agreed with Shaw and McKay that the children of the streets will be more likely to encounter delinquent groups.** Nevertheless, their primary contention was that the process of learning criminal behavior in association with other lawbreakers, can occur in the opulence of Beverly Hills as well as in the slum streets of Watts.

In terms of social policy, Cressey (1955) suggested that much of the traditional effort to control delinquency, whether using punishment or rehabilitation, is wasted unless delinquents are "assimilated into groups which emphasize values conducive to law-abiding behavior and, concurrently, alienated from groups emphasizing values

conducive to criminality.... Both reformers and those to be reformed must achieve status with the group by the exhibition of 'pro-reform' or anticriminal values and behavior patterns."

*Youth Subculture Theory*

It is significant that **the concept of "peer pressure" also received support in the 1950's and early 1960's from a large group of theorists who were concerned less with delinquency than with the remarkably changed status of youth in American society.** In contrast to prior centuries, young people found themselves without any clearcut, responsible, social role in society. Furthermore, according to Ralph England (1960):

> "the groundwork for this outcome was laid a century or more ago when youngsters were gradually removed from functional roles in the economy through restrictive apprenticeship codes, protective labor legislation, and the compulsory education movement.... The result was that for probably the first time a major society deactivated a large and energetic segment of its population without clearly redefining the status and function of the segment."

Indeed, England made a good point. Child labor was no longer needed.

But being put out to pasture was not the worst problem that children faced. Rather, it was their subjection "to a confusing array of competing authorities" (Davis, 1944). **They were barred from productive labor but were expected to be hardworking; they attended school to develop their intellects but were not expected to challenge the opinions and authority of parents and teachers; they were sexually mature and encouraged to be socially skilled but were supposed to refrain from adult vices; and they were expected to be civic-minded**

**but could not hold public office or serve on juries.**

To further complicate matters, **the ill-defined phase in the life cycle called "adolescence" had continued to grow longer, not shorter** (Flacks, 1971; Keniston, 1972). For the first time in history, after mid-century, a majority of American youth entered college and many more continued to graduate school. Therefore, the upper limits of "adolescence" had increased from around 16 or 17 a few years before to the early or mid-twenties in the 1960's (Glaser, 1971). What, then, was the result?

One group of theorists argued that a fundamental law of sociology and anthropology is that social separation results in cultural differentiation" (Glaser, 1971). "So extreme is the gap [between the generations] that parents and their adolescent children literally represent [different] subcultures" (Williams, 1952). Soon, therefore, it becomes intolerable for young people to become different from their peers (Parsons, 1942). A youth subculture develops that is not only deviant according to adult standards, but which is a natural response to the "unnatural position in which [youth] find themselves in society" (Coleman, 1974).

**A second group of theorists, however, contended that youth subculture reflected the expectations of modern parents as well as their children.** Both had given up on traditional work roles for children and had come to view successful involvement with the youth crowd as a new moral imperative. Nothing was worse than the ignominy of an unpopular child (Berger, 1963; Scott and Vaz, 1963; Whyte, 1956). Furthermore, more than the home, it was the school that was supposed to facilitate this popularity.

Since popularity and social status were now based on peer expectations versus adult expectations, the role of the school was to create a benign atmosphere in which every child could integrate happily with some group. Even the authority of the school was diminished. Hence, like the first group of theorists, this one concluded not

merely that parental and school authority had been eroded, but also that a youth subculture had been spawned whose function it was to replace that authority. Because it encouraged hedonism and irresponsibility, the more adolescents were involved with it, the more delinquent they were likely to be.

But **since those who remain in school are more likely to be middle class than lower class, their delinquency is hedonistic rather than serious** (England, 1960; Kvaraceus and Miller, 1959). Meanwhile, the situation of lower class youth had grown even more desperate. Not only were they dispossessed of a viable role in society like other youth, but they did not fit in with the more popular groups and they were more likely to drop out of school. Hence, additional theories were needed to explain their behavior.

*Opportunity Theory*

**Perhaps the best known of these mid-century theories was Opportunity Theory.** Appealing to fundamental American beliefs, it appeared in two versions, one by Albert Cohen (1955) and the second by Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin (1960). **According to these theorists, the family is relatively unimportant when compared to the impact of other aspects of American life.**

1. The success ethic is a prized possession of all Americans. Both theorists began by stressing the idea that America has been the Promised Land to all its people. **Everyone, regardless of social class or race, wants to get ahead.** Thus, since every individual is encouraged to compete for success, there can be only one standard for measuring *legitimate* success: the middle class measuring rod (Cohen, 1955).
2. Opportunities for success are not equally distributed. In their attempts to compete, lower class children are handicapped, both because they are socialized in non-middle class ways (Cohen, 1955) and opportunities

for them are blocked by the existing class structure (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960). **Although they are taught that education is an indispensable tool for upward mobility, their parents provide them with much less training in self discipline, they have much less contact with structured learning situations, and they are thrown into unsupervised contact with their peers at a much earlier age.** Equally bad, their parents, who are neither better nor worse than other parents, simply cannot afford to send them to summer camp, to give them violin lessons, or to keep them in school, particularly beyond high school (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960).

3. Blocked opportunities cause strain. **Given these conditions, lower class children are programmed to fail.** However, this programming is more the fault of the way society is structured than of poor emotional relations within the family. Despite their undying belief in the American Dream, "the disparity between what [they] are led to want and what is actually available to them is the source of a major problem of adjustment.... Faced with limitations on legitimate avenues of access to conventional goals and unable to revise their aspirations downward, they experience intense frustrations" (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960).
4. Strain produces delinquent subcultures. **Despite these frustrations, a sizable number of lower class youngsters refuse to withdraw from competition and to shoulder the life-long dissatisfactions of working class Americans like Archie Bunker. Rather, they turn to delinquent peers and subcultures for a solution.** But since this solution inevitably produces a loss of respectability, the only way they can handle their anxiety is to deny middle class values completely. Thus, "the hallmark of the delinquent subculture is the explicit and wholesale repudiation of middle class standards and the adoption of their very antithesis" (Cohen, 1955). That is why

delinquent acts often make no sense to middle class adults. They are nonutilitarian, malicious, and negativistic.

Unlike Cohen, however, Cloward and Ohlin (1960) suggest that **the American Dream rarely loses its hold, even on delinquents.** Rather, when they are frustrated in their pursuit of legitimate success, they simply turn to *illegitimate* means. But since even illegitimate opportunities are limited, some boys continue to exhibit their frustration by joining conflict gangs or becoming chronic users of drugs and alcohol. But whatever the outcome, it is delinquent subcultures that encourage criminal conduct, not the traumas of divorce, a cruel father, or a permissive mother.

**Even as this theory assumed increasing popularity, there were cynics.** One was David Bordua (1962) who remarked that "the discussion of delinquency in recent sociological theory...seems to be distinguished more by a desire to avoid 'psychologizing' than by a desire to understand delinquency." Meanwhile, Daniel Moynihan (1969) was even more cynical. He said,

> "A half century of international sociology had produced a set of propositions not far from Father Flanagan's assertion that 'there is no such thing as a bad boy.' Cloward and Ohlin argued that delinquents were resorting to desperately deviant and dangerous measures in order to *conform* to the routine goals of the larger society. If that society wished them to conform not only in their objectives but in their means for achieving them, it had only to provide the *opportunity* to do so. Opportunity was the master concept."

Indeed, it was a master concept. **Because the stress on opportunity was quintessentially American, it became the cornerstone for the most ambitious attempts yet made to fight delinquency: The President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime, Mobilization for Youth, and the War on Poverty** (Marris and Rein, 1973; Moynihan, 1969).

**Youth crime would be reduced by giving all youngsters a stake in conformity, not just those whose parents were well-placed and influential.**

*Control Theory*

**Soon, though, a more conservative tide began to sweep the country.** One of its leaders in the criminological arena was Travis Hirschi, yet another sociologist. Sharply critical of the macro-level theories of the past 30 or 40 years, Hirschi resurrected, in 1969, the Freudian contention that it is not criminals alone who are animals "but that we are all animals, and thus all naturally capable of committing criminal acts." Hence, **the central question is not , "Why did they do it?" Since human nature is inherently antisocial, the appropriate question is, "Why don't they do it?" Why do most young people refrain from delinquent acts?** (Hirschi, 1969).

**Hirschi said that the answer lies not in the class structure or in the standards of the peer group but in the strength of the child's bond to society.** We are moral beings to the extent that we have internalized the norms of society and have become sensitive to the needs of others. What is more, the strength of that bond is heavily dependent upon the quality of relations within the family.

But in contrast to Freud, Hirschi also theorized that those relations are not the only elements of the bond. There are four additional elements.

The first is *attachment.* It refers to the ties of affection and respect between children and such key persons as parents, teachers, and friends. If children are strongly attached to one or both parents, they are much more likely to develop respect for teachers, for other authorities, and for their peers. But if they begin by being alienated from their parents, they will be alienated from others.

The second element is *commitment.* It has to do with the extent to which children are committed to the ideal

requirements of childhood: getting an education; postponing participation in adult activities like drinking, smoking, or sex; and dedicating themselves to long-term career objectives.

The third element is *involvement*. Since, in fact, adolescents have been stripped of responsible roles, those who are kept busy doing conventional things like taking out the garbage, washing dishes, studying, participating in the boy or girl scouts, or engaging in sports will not have the time to be delinquent. They will be insulated against it.

The fourth element is *belief*. **Some children simply feel no moral obligation to conform to the law and are not offended by criminal behavior. But if they believe in the morality of law, they will be less likely to commit delinquent acts.**

In short, **Hirschi argues that if a child is firmly *attached* to parents and other authority figures, is *committed* to long-range goals, is *involved* in conventional pursuits and *believes* in the morality of law, it matters little what his sex, race, or social class might be; he will be a conformist.** But if his socialization has been ineffective, then he will be free to deviate by uncontrolled, and essentially evil, impulses.

The policy implications of Hirschi's theory and its testability are readily apparent. But in contrast to Freudian theory, which emphasizes the need for psychological change within the individual, it implied the need for significant changes in the way the family and other youth-socializing institutions respond to delinquents: (1) to *reattach* them to family, school, and conventional friends; (2) to reinforce their *commitments* to study, work, and socially acceptable leisure activities; (3) to reward their *involvements* in conventional pursuits; and (4) to provide support for a *belief* in the morality of law. While the family is important, other key institutions must be involved in restoring the bonds of the delinquent to society.

## The Family and the Evidence

A brief recapitulation is in order before reviewing the evidence relative to all of these theories. In the 19th century Americans were convinced that family depravity was at the root of delinquent behavior. That is why they constructed asylums and reformatories in an attempt to replicate the functions of the family and why they invented the juvenile court to act in lieu of parents.

**In the first third of this century biological and Freudian theories more than reinforced these beliefs. If biologists were to be believed, the degenerate offspring of defective parents either had to be confined or executed. Or, if Freud was correct, deep psychotherapy was needed to rescue inherently evil children from parents who had failed to socialize them properly.**

**Then, from the 1930's through the 1960's, a variety of theorists insisted that delinquency could not be understood without attention to a host of extrafamilial factors. Moreover, these factors were largely social, not biological or psychological.** Although all Americans are enjoined by the success ethic to compete for wealth and status, a significant number of them, parents as well as children, are hampered by poverty, discrimination, inequality, and the demoralization that follows. To make matters worse, society has largely emasculated all responsible roles for children, enjoining them, instead, to seek popularity among their peers. Delinquency, therefore, must be viewed as an understandable response to these conditions. Peer groups and youth subcultures encourage delinquency because it makes sense, either as a means of gaining status or as a means of pursuing success illegitimately. Furthermore, it requires intervention designed to eliminate discrimination, to enhance education, and to provide all youth with opportunities for responsible roles as well as success.

**Finally, in the 1970's, the role of the**

**family was reemphasized.** But even then, it was not seen as an exclusive cause of lawbreaking. Rather, delinquency was the result of failures in the socialization process which, while beginning in the family, also took place in the school and other youth-serving institutions. Likewise, it implied the need for community activities by which the bonds of the delinquent could be restored. What, then, does the evidence indicate?

*Broken Homes*

A number of investigators have provided evidence that broken homes are more likely to produce delinquent children (Chilton and Markle, 1972; Cockburn and Maclay, 1965; Cowie et al., 1968; Datesman and Scarpitti, 1975; Monahan, 1957; Rodman and Grams, 1969). One investigator said that not only are officially delinquent boys and girls more likely to come from broken homes but that, among girls, "the proportions from incomplete families are so high that there can hardly be any doubt as to the importance of parental deprivation to them" (Monahan, 1957). Even the most devout of today's family theorists experience some doubt when statements like this are made. The reasons are more methodological than theoretical.

*Official vs. Self-Reported Delinquency*

First, there is the fact that many family studies have used official police and court data to separate delinquents from nondelinquents. When this is done, there is always the danger of self-fulfilling prophecy (the Huck Finn syndrome mentioned earlier) that some children have been made wards of the court more because their families are broken than because they have actually committed more criminal acts. This can occur without clear procedures that separate neglect from criminality.

In an effort to remove this possibility, more and more investigators have turned to juveniles themselves for accounts of their actual delinquent behavior: How many

criminal acts have they committed? How serious were these acts? Were their acts discovered and acted upon?

When this has been done, the findings have confirmed the concerns over official data. **Not only is the "dark figure" of crime far greater than ever reported by the police, but nine out of ten delinquent acts go undetected and unacted upon by anyone in authority** (Erickson and Empey, 1963; Gold, 1966; Murphy et al., 1946; Williams and Gold, 1972). Hence, one is better advised to use self-report data rather than official data if one wants to discover whether family problems are, in fact, related to a child's actual lawbreaking.

*Measuring "Family Problems"*

**A second major problem has had to do with the indiscriminate use of the term "family problems," without any clear definition as to what those problems are:** Is it whether the family is broken? Is it the quality of the relationship between one or both parents and the child? Is it the type of discipline that parents exercise? Is it the way they supervise their children? Is it whether parents use drugs, drink excessively, or engage in obvious extra-marital affairs?

These are not idle questions because some answers must be explicit before valid measures can be made or before the court can take effective remedial action. Fortunately, some improvements have also been made in research studies of this issue.

*Love, Supervision, and Respect*

**Based on self-report as well as official data, numerous studies indicate that the children *least* likely to report having violated the law are those who feel loved, who identify with their parent(s), and who respect their parents' wishes** (Hindelang, 1973; Hirschi, 1969; Johnson, 1979; Nye, 1958). By

contrast, *lawbreakers* are more likely to come from homes, *intact as well as broken*, in which: (1) cruelty, neglect, erratic discipline, and parental conflict are present (Farrington and West, 1981; Glueck and Glueck, 1968); (2) parental supervision is low (Hirschi, 1969; Jensen, 1972); and (3) communication and mutual support are lacking (Hirschi, 1969; Poole and Regoli, 1979). Furthermore, while occasional studies indicate that parental conflict may have a somewhat greater negative effect on girls than on boys (Norland et al., 1979), most indicate that gender makes strikingly little difference (Jensen and Eve, 1976). Family conflict is about as likely to produce delinquent behavior among boys as among girls.

In summary, then, **the evidence suggests, first, that "the presence or absence of parents is less relevant to an understanding of delinquency than is the quality of the parent-child relationship"** (Jensen and Rojek, 1980). Quality, not divorce, is more important. Second, those juveniles most likely to be delinquent—male or female, black or white, middle or lower class—are those whose attachment to their parents is weak (Dinitz et al., 1962; Hirschi, 1969; Norland et al., 1979). This does not mean that class or race are unimportant, since the degree of attachment may differ from group to group. But it does suggest that the stronger the attachment, the greater the conformity to law.

*Other Theoretical Variables and the Family*

But even these answers do not suffice. What about the possibility that family factors interact with such other variables as class, race, peer identification, or success in school?

To begin with, current data still confirm the contention of Shaw and McKay that delinquent acts tend to be somewhat more serious and frequent in ghetto areas (Wolfgang, Figlio and Sellin, 1972; Elliott and Ageton, 1980). Hirschi (1969) argued that besides attachment to family, school relationships, belief in the law and

involvement in constructive activities were important. Finally, numerous studies have confirmed subculture theorists' contention that the majority of delinquent acts are group, not individual, acts. **Whether male or female, in urban settings or small towns, young people are, indeed, herd animals and tend to follow the dictates of the group** (Erickson, 1973a, 1973b; Erickson and Jensen, 1977, Glueck and Glueck, 1952; Scott, 1956). Hence, it is clear that other reasons for delinquency must be considered along with the family.

1. Attachment to family. We have already seen that serious problems are likely if the family is unable to prepare the children to achieve in middle class institutions or if the quality of its interpersonal relations is poor. But more than intra-family failures are at issue. What about the effects of demoralization that are due to such external factors as poverty, racism, or discrimination?

   Consider but one devastating example. Although black people comprise only about 11 percent of the population, they constitute from 40 to 50 percent of all murder victims (FBI, 1974-1983). In some cities, the rate has been as high as 70 percent (Block and Zimring, 1973). As a result, **"homicide has a greater impact upon the life expectations of black men than all but three ailments —heart disease, malignant neoplasms (cancer), and cerebrovascular disease"** (Farley, 1980). Therefore, due to the legacies of slavery and discrimination in this country, it is almost trite to say that family relations have been less than desirable for many blacks.
2. Weak commitment to the norms of childhood. Evidence also suggests that **poor attachment to the family tends to weaken the commitments of children to the norms of childhood.** At an earlier age than most, **they begin to drink, to smoke, to date, to engage in sex, and to seek to own a car.**

These activities not only diminish concern with school, work and study but, worse, take children off the conventional track that leads from childhood to adulthood (Hirschi, 1969; Hindelang, 1973; Johnson, 1979; Shover et al., 1979).

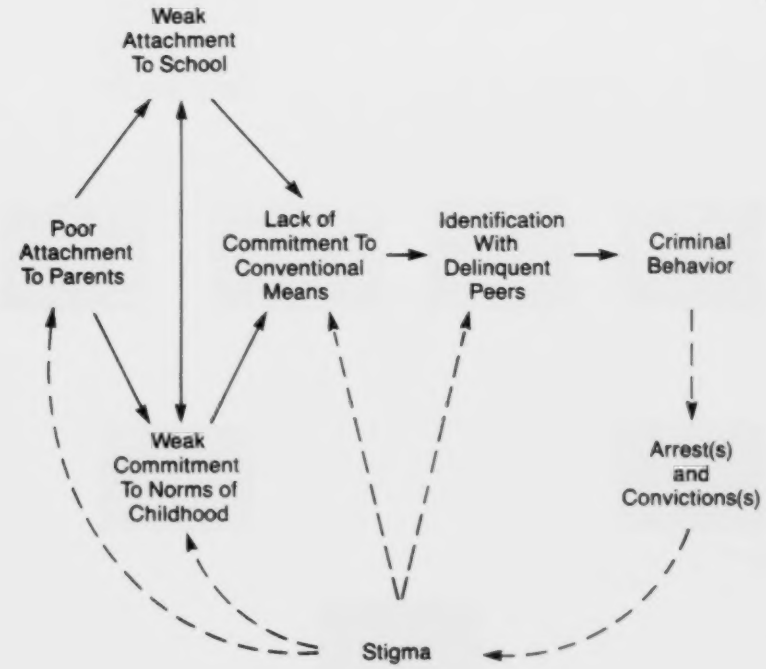
3. Reduced attachment to school. Poor attachment to the home also contributes to a reduction in the attachment of the child to the school. He does progressively less well on achievement tests, earns lower grades, and is more likely to drop out (Elliott and Voss, 1974; Empey and Lubeck, 1971; Hirschi, 1969; Johnson, 1979; Polk and Schafer, 1972; Rankin, 1980; Stinchcombe, 1964). But this failure to achieve is a function of educational deficiencies as well as family deficiencies. **Urban schools, in particular, are often characterized by disorganization, undue segregation of children from adult role models, and unacceptable rates of crime** as well as boredom (Elliott and Voss, 1974; Frease, 1973; National Institute of Education, 1978).
4. Lack of commitment to long-term goals. In turn, the tendency to fail in school, along with a weak commitment to the norms of childhood, eventually reduces marginal youngsters' commitment to conventional means for success—studying hard, graduating from high school, going on to college, and finding a job with career potential. A downward spiral culminates in a state of mind in which the adolescents in question are unwilling or unable to pay the conventional price for success (Cernkovich and Giodano, 1979; Datesman and Scarpitti, 1975; Hirschi, 1969; Johnson, 1979; Rankin, 1980).
5. Identification with delinquent peers. Because they have left or have been pushed off of the main track that leads from childhood to adulthood, it is these young people who are most inclined to turn to like-minded peers as a source of adjustment (Empey and Lubeck, 1968; Erickson and Empey, 1963; Erickson and Jensen, 1977; Hindelang, 1973; Johnson, 1979).

Although delinquent groups tend to be poorly organized and transient and cannot provide the warmth and identity of a solid family, they are often the best that young pariahs have (Klein and Crawford, 1967; Matza, 1964; Miller, 1958; Short and Strodtbeck, 1965; Yablonsky, 1959). Thus, **while the majority of young people will defy authority some of the time, the more delinquent ones persist in doing so, even in the face of conflict with parents, teachers, conventional friends, and the law** (Empey and Lubeck, 1968; Jensen and Rojek, 1980).

Figure 1 has been constructed to illustrate these steps. It indicates that they constitute a process, not a single cause or event. Children do not simply experience

The Process that Leads to Lawbreaking

Figure 1



tensions at home and begin to rob, rape, and burglarize. Instead, the relation of the family to delinquency is probably indirect, mediated by poor adjustment at school, a loss of interest in conventional pursuits, and a tendency to identify with delinquent peers. Conversely, if this process could somehow be interrupted by a dedicated teacher, by compelling bonds to conventional friends, or by involvement in some consuming activity, the effects of poor family relations might be dissipated before delinquency occurs.

But Figure 1 also indicates that if the process continues it can become doubly destructive because its effects are reciprocal as well as interdependent; that is, the effects of poor adjustment over the years will escalate and will move backward as well as forward. For example, it seems likely that children whose ties to their parents and teachers are weak will further weaken those ties by failing to pass their courses, running around with the worst kids in the neighborhood, and even committing crimes.

What is more, there is evidence that even necessary interventions by police and courts can make this reciprocal process even more devastating for some. From the perspectives of parents and child, in particular, a dismal future now appears virtually hopeless, especially to a repeat offender who has been made a captive with other social outcasts (Erickson, 1964; Gove, 1980; Lemert, 1951). In short, **if we wish to explain chronic delinquency, we must recognize that it will likely be the result of a long process which will involve most of the institutions upon which we count to socialize children.**

## Implications for Social Policy

**The implications of this conclusion are straightforward. If we wish to either prevent delinquency or to restructure the lives of convicted offenders, somehow those institutions upon which we rely to**

**socialize children must be more involved in strengthening or reestablishing their bonds to conventional society.** Besides attempting to alter their antisocial tendencies and outlooks, we must: (1) reattach them to either their own families or to some family surrogate so that they can experience the love, nurturance, and supervision that they seem to require; (2) create a sense of community and purpose in the school so that necessary social and instrumental skills can be acquired; (3) commit them to long-term rather than hedonistic and transient pursuits; and (4) give them more opportunities for responsible involvement with adult role models and activities in lieu of segregating them into ghettos that are comprised almost exclusively of other immature, and often delinquent, youngsters.

A second implication is that these tasks cannot be left solely to judges, policemen, and correctional personnel. This has been our tendency for two centuries but it has not paid off as society has grown ever more urban and anonymous. The degree of social order in any society is heavily dependent upon cultural themes and social institutions that are maintained by legislatures, legal authorities, case law, and monstrous corporations as well as by such intimate moralnets as families, classrooms, neighborhoods, and small working groups, or in religious rituals and rites of passage to adulthood. Yet, as anthropologist Raoul Naroll (1983) clearly shows, most countries, including America, have witnessed a progressive destruction of these means of social control.

Naroll bases his conclusions on a monumental body of cross-cultural research which reveals a common outcome for a host of different cultures: **as society after society has industrialized and urbanized, it has observed a steady deterioration of the very institutions upon which it inevitably depends for a sense of community, for socializing the young and for social control. As in America, the result has been not only a rise in the crime**

**rates, but also a rise in rates of divorce, child abuse, mental illness, drug use, and virtually every other social ill known to humankind.**

Paradoxically, these outcomes often result from the best, as well as the worst, of intentions. For example, during the 1960's and 1970's, Americans sought to eliminate the last vestiges of prejudice and discrimination by creating a host of social movements—Civil Rights, Women's Rights, Children's Rights, Gay Rights and Grey Panther Movements. Yet, continued efforts to extend ever greater rights to every individual seemed inevitably to decrease the capacity of such informal moralnets as the family or the school to exercise the kinds of social control upon which every society depends so heavily to maintain order. It is probably no accident, therefore, that crime rates rose dramatically during the same period and that they remain at unacceptable levels today. In fact, after carefully studying these two sets of trends, Cohen and Felson (1979, 1980) concluded that a significant decrease of informal controls in locations traditionally reserved for family, neighborhoods, and community activities, was tied to the rapid rise in predatory crimes.

By way of illustration, consider the revolutionary changes that have taken place recently in basic American moralnets.

*The Family*

National surveys reveal that because of greater freedom of choice in the last two decades, the tendency for Americans to evaluate marriage positively dropped dramatically, particularly among women (Douvan, 1979). Simultaneously, the increase in divorce rates was striking. **While in 1940 there was one divorce for every six marriages, the 1975 rate was one in two.**

Equally important, greater sexual freedom stimulated a remarkable increase in the number of children born out of wedlock. Whereas **in 1940 only one child in**

**30 was born to unmarried parents, the rate had increased to one in six by 1977** (Nye and Lamberts, 1981). **As a result of both trends,** therefore, **12.6 million children, 20 percent of the whole, now live with one parent, 90 percent of whom are women** (U.S. Commission, 1983).

Significantly, the great majority of these women are not mature, white, middle class women. Rather, over half of them are teenagers who are mostly poor and of minority extraction. For example, by 1981 women headed almost half of all black families with children, and 22 percent of Hispanic families, as contrasted with 15 percent of white families (U.S. Commission, 1983). Thus, trends that have encouraged greater freedom for the individual have also had their negative aspects.

One is the attempt by uneducated, poverty-stricken children to raise children of their own. A second is the dramatic fact that three-quarters of a million children run away from home each year, a population among whom rates of victimization, prostitution, drug addiction, and crime are much higher (Nye, 1980). A third is the ironic fact that the chances a child will grow up with both parents, in the same household, have decreased to about the same level they were in the 17th and 18th centuries, when it was death and the apprenticeship system rather than single parenthood and divorces that separated parents from children.

*The School*

Meanwhile, what of that other primary socializing institution, the school? The current documentation of declining test scores is but the tip of the iceberg. Not only have students been far more likely than teachers to be victims of crime in their schools, but crime has been most pronounced in the large, impersonal, urban schools which were constructed on the assumption that they could offer a richer curriculum than schools that were smaller, more intimate, and more likely to promote a sense of community (National Institute of Education, 1978).

What is more, **the growing emphasis upon child and adult liberation has contributed to other ironies, one of which is the idea that the schools should no longer play an *in loco parentis* role** (Short, 1979). Indeed, recent recommendations by the American Bar Association stress not only a reduction in this role but also an increase in the use of formal semi-legal procedures by which to maintain order. When trouble arises, another court should be installed (Flicker, 1977).

Perhaps such rules are needed because of a declining sense of intimacy and trust in the schools. But while this development might not be disruptive by itself, it is occurring at the very time when the informal controls of the family are also decreasing. Worse still, Americans have experienced a loss of social purpose during this period, witnessed by declining support for dependent families, for education, and for youth programs (Allen, 1981).

*Transition to Adulthood*

Finally, there is transition to the world of work. **Between 1951 and 1976, the proportion of males over 65 who were employed declined from 45 percent to 19 percent** (Davis, 1979). However, **this decrease, was not accompanied by a compensatory increase in the employment of the young, male or female. Rather, it occurred among mature married women** (Carter and Glick, 1976). **As a consequence, almost half of the nation's unemployed have been among young people, particularly among poor, single-parent mothers and their offspring** (U.S. Commission, 1983).

The implications of such trends are profound. On the one hand, the birth rate has generally declined. For example, in 1976 only 24 percent of American males were below the age of 14. Among the population officially classified as poor, the rates were almost

double: 48 percent among blacks and even higher among Hispanics (Silberman, 1978). Thus, the decrease in the controls of family and school, particularly for those most likely to be either the perpetrators or the victims of crime, has not been matched by a more effective rite-of-passage to the adult world of work. Instead, young people find themselves in ever greater competition with more powerful groups, not merely for the largess of society, but for jobs. What, then, is the bottom line?

*Mechanized Justice*

**The bottom line is not encouraging.** Current trends indicate only a slight chance that the implications of research on delinquency can be easily implemented; that is, to make greater use of traditional moralnets like home and school and to take a greater interest in nurturing, committing, and supervising young people who have been in trouble with the law. Not only has there been declining support for such an approach, but **a self-interested and frightened public have been told by disillusioned intellectuals that a more "mechanized" approach to juvenile justice is our only defense** (Fogel, 1979; van den Haag, 1975; Von Hirsch, 1976; Wilson, 1975).

Since, as some of these intellectuals have put it, "there is virtually no sound proof that, short of killing him, anyone knows how to stop another from committing crimes" (Fox, 1974), we must make a "crucial shift in perspective from a commitment to do good to a commitment to do as little mischief as possible" (Gaylin and Rothman, 1976). Rather than facing up either to the implications of research or rapid change, we should take refuge in the discredited practices of an ancient past.

Worse still, **even that great superparent, the juvenile court, has reflected these dismal suggestions. The age of accountability has been lowered, "just deserts" has become a euphemism for punishment,**

**and learning nothing from the lessons of the 19th century has filled our youth prisons to over-flowing. Hence, the watchword now is that the focus of the court should be upon punishing the small minority who are murderers, robbers, and rapists, not upon helping harried parents and educators to deal more effectively with the large majority who are dropouts, teenaged prostitutes, potheads and thieves** (Polier, 1979). We cannot, in other words, set out to do what the court set out to do originally.

There is, however, an alternative—an alternative that is suggested by both the research reviewed in this paper and the cross-cultural research of Naroll (1983). On the one hand, we can endeavor to make greater use of the traditional moralnets that do remain: the caring parents, the successful schools, and the other interested community groups who are willing to work with delinquents. They have strengths that can still be organized and utilized.

On the other hand, we cannot be content with assuming that the families, schools, and neighborhoods of the past can be counted upon to control children the way they once did. Inexorable and continuing changes have been too great. Rather, as Naroll suggests, we must begin to invent new cultural ideologies and institutions that are better suited to a more individualistic, narcissistic, and anonymous world. In other words, we must begin to confront a series of challenging questions: **How might modern society go about deliberately creating new moral ideologies organized around contemporary cultural themes? For example, since the sexual revolution and the Women's Rights Movement have greatly reduced the traditional constraints of the nuclear family, what new ideologies might be invoked to encourage the nurturing and guidance that it used to provide?** How can these ideologies be used to create

new moralnets by which to translate these functions into workable relationships?

How might society also translate these ideologies into our educational, economic, political, and legal structures as well? For instance, since "service" industries have now become a vital part of the American economy, how might they be utilized for moral and socializing functions, particularly in cooperation with single parents and their offspring? **How might the concept of "service" also be used to organize moralnets in which the young can better experience the traditional rites of passage to adulthood?** While these rites have largely disappeared in our monolithic schools and on the streets of our metropolitan slums, perhaps the idle among the elderly might be recruited to assist in this task.

How might such efforts attract or coerce the involvement of power brokers such as judges, politicians, and corporate and labor leaders, as well as ordinary powerless people like sociologists? **Attempts to answer these questions might appear far more constructive to the historians of the future than the despairing invocations of just deserts, punishment, and incarceration.**

**References**


*Allen, F. A.* **The Decline of the Rehabilitative Ideal.** *New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981.*

*Aries, Phillippe.* **Centuries of Childhood.** *Trans. by Robert Baldick. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962.*

*Baker, Harvey H. "Procedure for the Boston Juvenile Court."* **Preventive Treatment of Neglected Children.** *pp. 318-327. Edited by Hastings H. Hart. New York: Charities Publication Committee, 1910.*

*Banay, Ralph S.* **Youth in Despair.** *New York: Coward-McGann, 1948.*

*Berger, Bennett M. "Adolescence and Beyond."* **Social Problems** *10 (Spring 1963): pp. 394-408.*

*Block, Richard, and Zimring, Franklin E. "Homicide in Chicago, 1965-1970."* **Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency** *10 (January 1973): pp. 1-12.*

*Bordua, David J. "Some Comments on Theories of Group Delinquency."* **Sociological Inquiry** *33 (Spring 1962): pp. 245-260.*

*Bremner, Robert H., et al., eds.* **Children and Youth in America: A Documentary History.** *2 Vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970.*

*Brockway, Zebulon R. "The American Reformatory Prison System." In* **Prison Reform and Criminal Law**, *pp. 88-107. Edited by Charles R. Henderson. New York: Charities Publication Committee, 1910.*

*Carter, Hugh, and Glick, Paul C.* **Marriage and Divorce: A Social and Economic Study**. *Rev. ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976.*

*Cernkovich, Stephen A., and Giordano, Peggy C. "Delinquency, Opportunity and Gender."* **Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology** *70 (1979): pp. 145-151.*

*Chilton, Roland J., and Markle, Gerald E. "Family Disruption, Delinquency and the Effect of Subclassification."* **American Sociological Review** *37 (February 1972): pp. 93-99.*

*Cloward, Richard A., and Ohlin, Lloyd E.* **Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs**. *New York: Free Press, 1960.*

*Cockburn, J. J., and Maclay, I. "Sex Differentials in Juvenile Delinquency."* **British Journal of Criminology** *5 (July 1965): pp. 289-308.*

*Cohen, Albert K.* **Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang**. *New York: Free Press, 1955.*

*Cohen, Lawrence E., and Felson, Marcus. "Social Change and Crime Rate Trends: A Routine Activity Approach."* **American Sociological Review** *44 (1979): pp. 588-608.*

*Cohen, Lawrence E., and Felson, Marcus. "Property Crime Rates in the United States: A Macrodynamic Analysis, 1947-1977."* **American Journal of Sociology** *86 (1980): pp. 90-118.*

*Coleman, James S., et al.* **Youth: Transition to Adulthood**. *Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.*

*Cowie, John, Cowie, Valeria, and Slater, Eliot.* **Delinquency in Girls**. *London: Heineman, 1968.*

*Craig, Maude M., and Glick, Selma J. "Ten Years of Experience with the Glueck Prediction Tables."* **Crime and Delinquency** *9 (July 1963): pp. 249-261.*

*Cressey, Donald R. "Changing Criminals: The Application of the Theory of Differential Association."* **American Journal of Sociology** *61 (September 1955): pp. 116-120.*

*Datesman, Susan K., and Scarpitti, Frank R. "Female Delinquency and Broken Homes: A Reassessment."* **Criminology** *13 (May 1975): pp. 33-55.*

*Davis, Kingsley. "Adolescence and the Social Structure."* **Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences** *236 (November 1984): pp. 1-16.*

*Davis, Kingsley. "Demographic Changes and the Future of Childhood."* **Childhood and Juvenile Justice**, *pp. 113-137. Edited by LaMar T. Empey. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979.*

*Dinitz, Simon, et al. "Delinquency Vulnerability: A Cross Group and Longitudinal Analysis."* **American Sociological Review** *27 (August 1962): pp. 515-517.*

*Douvan, Elizabeth. "Twenty-year Comparison: Family Roles."* **IST Newsletter**. *University of Michigan (Winter 1979): pp. 4-5.*

*Elliott, Delbert S., and Voss, Harwin.* **Delinquency and Dropout**. *Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1974.*

*Elliott, Delbert S.; Ageton, Suzanne; and Canter, Rachelle J. "An Integrated Theoretical Perspective on Delinquent Behavior."* **Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency** *16 (January 1979): pp. 1-19.*

*Elliott, Delbert S., and Ageton, Suzanne S.* "Reconciling Race and Class Differences in Self Reported and Official Estimates of Delinquency." **American Sociological Review** *45 (February 1980): pp. 95-110.*

*Empey, LaMar T., and Lubeck, Steven G.* "Conformity and Deviance in the 'Situation of Company'." **American Sociological Review** *33 (October 1968): pp. 760-774.*

*Empey, LaMar T., and Lubeck, Steven G.* **Explaining Delinquency**. *Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1971.*

*England, Ralph W.* "A Theory of Middle-class Juvenile Delinquency." **The Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science** *50 (April 1960): pp. 535-540.*

*Erickson, Kai T.* "Notes on the Sociology of Deviance." **The Other Side: Perspectives on Deviance**, *pp. 9-22. Edited by Howard S. Becker. New York: Free Press, 1964.*

*Erickson, Maynard.* "Group Violations, Socioeconomic Status and Official Delinquency." **Social Forces** *52 (September 1973): pp. 41-52.*

*Erickson, Maynard.* "Group Violations and Official Delinquency: The Group Hazard Hypothesis." **Criminology** *11 (August 1973): pp. 127-160.*

*Erickson, Maynard L., and Empey LaMar T.* "Court Records, Undetected Delinquency and Decision Making." **Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science** *54 (December 1963): pp. 456-469.*

*Erickson, Maynard L., and Jensen, Gary F.* "Delinquency is Still Group Behavior: Toward Revitalizing the Group Premise in the Sociology of Deviance." **Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology** *68 (1977): pp. 262-273.*

*Farley, Reynolds.* "Homicide Trends in the United States." **Demography** *17 (May 1980): pp. 177-188.*

*Farrington, D. P., and West, D. J.* "The Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development." **Prospective Longitudinal Research: An Empirical Basis for Primary Psychosocial Disorders**. *Edited by S. A. Mednick and A. E. Baert. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.*

*Federal Bureau of Investigation.* **Uniform Crime Reports for the United States**, *1974-1983.*

*Flacks, Richard.* **Youth and Social Change**. *New York: Markham, 1971.*

*Flicker, Barbara D.* **Standards for Juvenile Justice: A Summary and Analysis**. *Cambridge: Ballinger, 1977.*

*Fogel, David.* **We Are the Living Proof: The Justice Model for Corrections**. *Cincinnati: Anderson, 1979.*

*Fox, Sanford J.* "The Reform of Juvenile Justice: The Child's Right to Punishment." **Juvenile Justice** *25 (August 1974): pp. 2-9.*

*Frease, Dean E.* "Delinquency, Social Class and the Schools." **Sociology and Social Research** *57 (July 1973): pp. 443-459.*

*Freud, Sigmund.* **An Outline of Psychoanalysis**. *New York: Norton, 1963.*

*Gaylin, Willard, and Rothman, David J.* "Introduction." **Doing Justice: The Choice of Punishment**, *pp. xxi-xli. Edited by Andrew Von Hirsch. New York: Hill and Wang, 1976.*

*Gillis, John R.* **Youth and History**. *New York: Academic Press, 1974.*

*Glaser, Daniel.* **Social Deviance**. *Chicago: Markham, 1971.*

*Glueck, Sheldon, and Glueck, Eleanor.* **Delinquents in the Making**. *New York: Harper, 1952.*

*Glueck, Sheldon, and Glueck, Eleanor.* **Delinquents and Nondelinquents in Perspective**. *Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968.*

*Goddard, Henry H.* **Feeblemindedness: Its Causes and Consequences.** *New York: Macmillan, 1914.*

*Goddard, Henry H.* **Juvenile Delinquency.** *New York: Dodd, 1921.*

*Gold, Martin. "Undetected Delinquent Behavior."* **Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency** *3 (January 1966): pp. 27-46.*

*Goring, Charles.* **The English Conflict.** *London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1913.*

*Gove, Walter. "The Labeling Perspective: An Overview."* **The Labeling of Deviance,** *pp. 9-32. Edited by Walter R. Gove. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980.*

*Hakeem, Michael. "A Critique of the Psychiatric Approach to the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency."* **Social Problems** *5 (Winter 1957): pp. 194-205.*

*Hart, Hastings.* **Preventive Treatment of Neglected Children.** *New York: Russell Sage, 1910.*

*Henderson, Charles R., ed.* **Prison Reform and Criminal Law.** *New York: Charities Publication Committee, 1910.*

*Hindelang, Michael J. "Causes of Delinquency: A Partial Replication."* **Social Problems** *21 (Spring 1973): pp. 471-487.*

*Hirschi, Travis.* **Causes of Delinquency.** *Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.*

*Hooton, Ernest A.* **Crime and the Man.** *Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931.*

*Hooton, Ernest A.* **The American Criminal: An Anthropological Study.** *Vol. I. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939.*

*Hughes, H. Stuart.* **Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought 1890-1930.** *New York: Vintage, 1961.*

*Jensen, Gary F. "Parents, Peers, and Delinquent Action: A Test of Differential Association Perspective."* **American Journal of Sociology** *78 (1972): pp. 562-575.*

*Jensen, Gary F., and Even, Raymond. "Sex Differences in Delinquency: An Examination of Popular Sociological Explanations."* **Criminology** *13 (February 1976): pp. 427-448.*

*Jensen, Gary, and Rojek, Dean G.* **Delinquency: A Sociological View.** *Lexington: D. C. Heath, 1980.*

*Johnson, Richard E.* **Juvenile Delinquency and Its Origins.** *New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979.*

*Keniston, Kenneth. "Youth: A 'New' Stage of Life."* **The Prospect of Youth.** *Edited by Thomas J. Cottle. Boston: Little, Brown, 1972.*

*Kessen, W.* **The Child.** *New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1965.*

*Kett, Joseph F. "Adolescence and Youth in Nineteenth Century America."* **The Family in History,** *pp. 95-110. Edited by Robert I. Rotberg. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.*

*Kittre, Nicholas N.* **The Right to be Different: Deviance and Enforced Therapy.** *Baltimore: Penguin, 1973.*

*Klein, Dorie. "The Etiology of Female Crime: A Review of the Literature."* **Issues in Criminology** *8 (Fall 1973): pp. 3-30.*

*Klein, Malcolm W., and Crawford, Louis Y. "Groups, Gangs and Cohesiveness."* **Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency** *1 (January 1967): pp. 63-75.*

*Kobrin, Solomon. "The Chicago Area Project—A 25-year Assessment."* **The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences** *322 (March 1959): pp. 20-39.*

*Kobrin, Solomon.* "*The Formal Logical Properties of the Shaw-McKay Delinquency Theory.*" **Ecology, Crime and Delinquency,** *pp.101-132. Edited by Harwin L. Voss and David M. Petersen. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1971.*

*Kvaraceus, William, and Miller, Walter B.* "*Norm-violating Behavior in Middle-class Culture.*" **Middle-class Juvenile Delinquency,** *pp. 233-241. Edited by Edmund W. Vaz. New York: Harper and Row, 1959.*

*Laslett, Barbara.* "*The Family as a Public and Private Institution: An Historical Perspective.*" **Journal of Marriage and the Family** *35 (August 1973): pp. 480-492.*

*Laslett, Peter.* **Household and Family in Past Time.** *Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972.*

*Lathrop, Julia C.* "*The Background of the Juvenile Court in Illinois.*" **The Child, the Clinic and the Court,** *pp. 290-297, 320-330. Edited by Julia Addams. New York: New Republic, 1975.*

*Lemert, Edwin M.* **Social Pathology.** *New York: McGraw Hill, 1951.*

*Lemert, Edwin M.* **Instead of Court: Diversion in Juvenile Justice.** *Public Service Publication No. 2127. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971.*

*Lombroso, Cesare.* **Crime, Its Causes and Remedies.** *Boston: Little, Brown, 1911.*

*Lombroso, Cesare.* **The Female Offender.** *New York: Appleton, 1920.*

*Marris, Peter, and Rein, Martin.* **Dilemmas of Social Reform.** *2nd ed. Chicago: Aldine, 1973.*

*Marwick, Elizabeth W.* "*Nature Versus Nurture: Patterns and Trends in Seventeenth Century French Child Rearing.*" *In* **The History of Childhood,** *pp. 259-302. Edited by Lloyd de Mause. New York: Psychohistory Press, 1974.*

*Matza, David.* **Delinquency and Drift.** *New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964.*

*Mause, Lloyd de.* **The History of Childhood.** *New York: Psychohistory Press, 1974.*

*McCaghy, Charles H.* **Deviant Behavior.** *New York: Macmillan, 1976.*

*Miller, Walter B.* "*Lower-class Culture as a Generating Milieu of Gang Delinquency.*" **Journal of Social Issues** *14 (Summer 1958): pp. 105-115.*

*Monahan, Thomas P.* "*Family Status and the Delinquent Child: A Reappraisal and Some New Findings.*" **Social Forces** *35 (March 1957): pp. 250-258.*

*Moynihan, Daniel P.* **Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding: Community Action in the War on Poverty.** *New York: Free Press, 1969.*

*Murphy, Fred J., et al.* "*The Incidence of Hidden Delinquency.*" **American Journal of Orthopsychiatry** *(October 1946): pp. 686-696.*

*Naroll, Raul.* **The Moral Order.** *Beverly Hills: Sage, 1983.*

*National Institute of Education.* **Violent Schools—Safe Schools.** *Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978.*

*National Probation and Parole Association.* **Guides for Juvenile Court Judges.** *New York: National Probation and Parole Association, 1957.*

*Norland, Stephen, et al.* "*Intrafamily Conflict and Delinquency.*" **Pacific Sociological Review** *22 (April 1979): pp. 223-240.*

*Nye, Ivan.* **Family Relationships and Delinquent Behavior.** *New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1958.*

*Nye, Ivan.* **Runaways: Some Critical Issues for Professionals and Society.** *Extension Bulletin 0744. Pullman: Washington State University, 1980.*

*Nye, Ivan, and Lamberts, Martha B.* **School-Age Parenthood.** *Extension Bulletin 0867. Pullman: Washington State University, 1981.*

*Parsons, Talcott. "Age and Sex in the Social Structure of the United States."* **American Sociological Review** *7 (October 1942): pp. 604-616.*

*Polier, Justine W. "Prescriptions for Reform—Doing What We Set Out to Do?" In* **Juvenile Justice: The Progressive Legacy and Current Reforms.** *Edited by LaMar T. Empey. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979.*

*Polk, Kenneth, and Schafer, Walter E., eds.* **School and Delinquency.** *Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972.*

*Poole, Eric D., and Regoli, Robert M. "Parental Support, Delinquent Friends and Delinquency: A Test of Interaction Effects."* **Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology** *70 (1979): pp. 188-193.*

*Rankin, Joseph H. "School Factors and Delinquency: Interactions by Age and Sex."* **Sociology and Social Research** *64 (April 1980): pp. 420-434.*

*Revised Statutes of Illinois, Section 21, 1899.*

*Rodman, Hyman, and Grams, Paul. "Juvenile Delinquency and the Family: A Review and Discussion." President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice.* **Task Force Report: Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime.** *Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967.*

*Rothman, David J.* **The Discovery of the Asylum.** *Boston: Little, Brown, 1971.*

*Rubin, Ted. "Transferring Responsibility for Juvenile Noncriminal Misconduct from Juvenile Courts to Nonauthoritarian Agencies." Mimeographed. Phoenix: Arizona Conference on Delinquency Intervention, 1974.*

*Sanders, Wiley B., ed.* **Juvenile Offenders for a Thousand Years.** *Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970.*

*Schlossman, Steven L.* **Love and the American Delinquent.** *Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.*

*Scott, Joseph W., and Vaz, Edmund W. "A Perspective on Middle-class Delinquency." In* **Middle-class Juvenile Delinquency,** *pp. 207-222. Edited by Edmund W. Vaz. New York: Harper and Row, 1963.*

*Scott, Peter. "Gangs and Delinquent Groups in London."* **British Journal of Delinquency** *(July 1956): pp. 4-26.*

*Shaw, Clifford R.* **Delinquency Areas.** *Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929.*

*Shaw, Clifford R., and McKay, Henry D.* **Social Factors in Juvenile Delinquency.** *Report of the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement. No. 13, Vol. 2. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931.*

*Shaw, Clifford R., and McKay, Henry D.* **Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas.** *Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942.*

*Shaw, Clifford R., and McKay, Henry D.* **Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas.** *rev. ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969.*

*Short, James F., Jr., and Strodtbeck, Fred L.* **Group Process and Gang Delinquency.** *Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965.*

*Short, James F., Jr. "Social Contexts of Child Rights and Delinquency."* **The Future of Childhood and Juvenile Justice,** *pp. 175-210. Edited by LaMar T. Empey. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979.*

*Shover, Neal, et al. "Gender Roles and Delinquency."* **Social Forces** *58 (1979): pp. 162-175.*

*Silberman, Charles E.* **Criminal Violence, Criminal Justice.** *New York: Random House, 1978.*

*Simon, Rita James.* **The Contemporary Woman and Crime.** *Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975.*

*Stone, Lawrence. "The Massacre of the Innocents."* **The New York Times Review** *14 (November 1974): pp. 25-31.*

*Stinchcombe, Arthur L.* **Rebellion in High School.** *Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964.*

*Sutherland, Edwin H., and Cressey, Donald R.* **Principles of Criminology.** *5th ed. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1955.*

*Sutherland, Edwin H. "Development of a Theory."* **The Sutherland Papers.** *Edited by Albert K. Cohen et al. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1956.*

*U.S. Bureau of the Census.* **Current Population Reports, Population Estimates,** *Series P-25, No. 123. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1955.*

*U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.* **A Growing Crisis: Disadvantaged Women and Their Children.** *Washington, D.C.: Clearinghouse Publication 78, 1983.*

*van den Haag, Ernest.* **Punishing Criminals: Concerning a Very Old and Painful Question.** *New York: Basic Books, 1975.*

*Von Hirsch, Andrew.* **Doing Justice: The Choice of Punishments.** *New York: Hill and Wang, 1976.*

*Whyte, William H., Jr.* **The Organization Man.** *New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956.*

*Wilkinson, Karen. "The Broken Family and Juvenile Delinquency: Scientific Explanations or Ideology?"* **Social Problems** *21 (June 1979): pp. 726-739.*

*Williams, Jay R., and Gold, Martin. "From Delinquent Behavior to Official Delinquency."* **Social Problems** *20 (Fall 1972): pp. 209-229.*

*Williams, Robin.* **American Society.** *New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952.*

*Wilson, James Q.* **Thinking About Crime.** *New York: Vintage Books, 1975.*

*Wolfgang, Marvin E., Figlio, Robert, and Sellin, Thorsten.* **Delinquency in a Birth Cohort.** *Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.*

*Yablonsky, Lewis. "The Delinquent Gang as a Near-group."* **Social Problems** *7 (Fall 1959): pp. 108-117.*

# The Family and Delinquency:

## A Judicial Perspective

*Hon. Maurice B. Cohill, Jr.*

Hunter Hurst, the Director of the National Center for Juvenile Justice, asked me if I would review Professor Empey's paper and respond to it. I said "Sure," knowing full-well that any judge or lawyer worth his salt can always find fault with the opinion of someone else. I had some second thoughts after having read the paper, not once but twice, but, unfortunately, by then it was too late to back out. I will attempt here to express some personal thoughts on the role of the family vis-a-vis delinquency, but I'm afraid you will not see much difference between Dr. Empey's analysis and my own.

As the staff at the Center knows, I'm fond of adding a new twist to an old conundrum. They say there are three things that every man claims he can do: run a hotel, manage a baseball team, and make a perfect martini. I add a fourth item: cure delinquency. Or, to paraphrase H. L. Mencken, "Every human problem has an easy solution: neat, plausible, and wrong."

If asked to write a conclusion to Professor Empey's paper in a sentence or two, I think it would be fair to say that: **The problems presented by young people today have their genesis in the dismantling of the family influence—from a decrease in the quality of the parent-child relationship and the quantity of responsible adult supervision provided for the child rather than from broken homes per se.** Second, there is a reduction in the delinquent child's attachment to school, which leads to a failure syndrome, resulting in the child identifying with delinquent peers. Third, this carries over to a failure of such young people to obtain employment.

Based on my experience as a juvenile court judge in Allegheny County (Pittsburgh, PA) for 11 years, I find

Dr. Empey's analysis to be consistent with my own. I found that most delinquents I saw came from homes with marital problems, perhaps with divorced or separated parents, but not necessarily so. Sometimes there would be a domineering mother with dad a mere shadow in the household; it might also be the reverse with the father controlling everything, sometimes being physically abusive to mother and the children, with mom doing nothing but wringing her hands. **I must say, though, that delinquents usually had one-parent homes, and the one parent was most often the mother. Often, there was evidence of alcohol problems and lack of parental education. Invariably though, there was no adult around who cared enough for the child to observe his behavior and correct him when he was found to be doing something wrong; or there was a lack of time and/or ability to do so.**

Second, there were problems at school, such as truancy and/or misbehavior, and status-type offenses in the community—running away, drinking, perhaps drug and sex experimentation before the child got into delinquent activities of a criminal nature. **A third factor that I noticed was that most of these juveniles did not score well on IQ tests.** They would score in the low average to below average range. I understand that Professor James Q. Wilson and colleague Richard Herrnstein at Harvard have recently re-opened the issue of whether some criminals are born rather than made. They contend that limited intelligence is the persistent correlate of criminal behavior. That finding squares with my personal experience as a juvenile court judge. For a while, we ran an opportunities school where skilled teachers "spoon-fed" some seriously delinquent boys under the tight supervision of a probation officer. Some of them who had been miserable failures in the regular school setting suddenly came to life and began to do well. One unexpected problem that we encountered

was in returning them to their own schools when we felt they had made sufficient progress. They preferred our school and didn't want to return; sort of like the "Sweat-Hogs" in that old TV series, "Welcome Back, Kotter."

At any rate, I agree with Dr. Empey that these problems are interrelated. **A child has to be taught to learn and the child coming from a stressful home situation has not been taught to learn.** In the distressed home situation, I think of the one parent (usually the mother) who is too overwhelmed with her own problems to provide home training so that the child is almost doomed to become a problem in school. The problems aren't apt to surface while the child is small enough to be physically manageable in school but, once he or she (usually he) reaches puberty, teachers can't physically handle him, nor should they, and you have a very good candidate for juvenile delinquency.

**In his historical summary of delinquency, Dr. Empey correctly pointed out that our nation has had and still has poverty, racial discrimination, and inequality of opportunity. If these life factors have always been with us, then why has delinquency increased?**

I was surprised that in his paper Dr. Empey did not place greater emphasis on the role of drugs in delinquent behavior than to refer to them only twice in passing. **I feel that it is impossible to over-emphasize the drug problem and its impact as a cause of crime and delinquency in this country.** If Dr. Empey would argue that drugs are a symptom rather than a cause, I would respectfully disagree. Perhaps *addiction* to drugs is a symptom, but once that symptom is present, it causes crime. I have rarely had a bank robber appear before me in Federal court who was not a drug addict committing the robberies to support his habit.

Incidentally, let me emphasize my feeling that whether or not a youngster becomes involved with

drugs is closely related to the parents' attitude on the subject. Let me share with you a couple of facts gleaned from the research of some rather able researchers to further underscore the importance of drugs. **Those of you who have read Dr. Marvin Wolfgang's work will recall that in his first study of "Delinquency in a Birth Cohort," he recorded only one narcotics offense for the entire cohort.** As you will recall, that birth cohort consisted of every male child born in the city of Philadelphia in 1945 who lived in Philadelphia until his 18th birthday. There was but one narcotics offense recorded among a total of 9,945 male youth who reached age 18. That is a narcotics offense rate of .1 per 1,000.

**By comparison, Dr. Wolfgang's second male cohort chalked up a total of 737 narcotics offenses.** This group consisted of youth born in the city of Philadelphia in 1958 who reached the age of 18 in 1976. The second cohort was somewhat larger than the first, consisting of 13,811 males, but when the numbers are converted to rates to control for population differences, the second cohort had a narcotics offense rate of 53.4 per thousand. **When all of these numbers are reduced to their essence, what they mean to me is that a youngster who reached 18 in the mid-seventies was more than 500 times as likely to be arrested for a narcotics offense than a youngster who reached age 18 in the mid-sixties. To me, the magnitude of difference is of such astonishing proportions that we must not ignore it** whether or not it is statistically significant, as researchers are wont to say.

Mobility is another factor that has become increasingly important since World War II. The fact that more and more young people have had access to cars since 1945 is an element in many crimes, as well as being the *object* of a lot of crime.

Television may be a third factor. I'm not about to stick

out my neck with an unsolicited opinion when even experts disagree as to the impact of sex and violence in television and the movies, but I have to think that certain aspects of television advertising may play a role in adolescent crime: "Life will be perfect if you drive a Belchfire 8." "You won't have any problem sleeping if you take a couple of our pills." "You won't have any pain with one of these." In other words, **television determines the child's value system to the extent that it becomes a replacement for parents.**

Well, what's the answer? I know I could run a hotel, and I could manage a baseball team successfully; I make a pretty good martini, so I might as well tell you how to cure delinquency. The answer is education in the broadest sense of the word as far as I'm concerned. Young people and their parents often find themselves in a vicious circle of poverty and unemployment. No one will argue that the better education one has, the better his chance for successful employment.

Dr. Empey suggests four approaches to social policy to re-establish the bonds of children to conventional society: 1. reattaching them to their own families or some other surrogate; 2. creating a sense of community and purpose in school; 3. committing them to long-term pursuits rather than hedonistic and transient ones; and 4. involving them with positive adult role models.

**While I agree with all of those objectives, I submit that schools are the only vehicle that can accomplish them with important back-up from the juvenile courts and volunteer organizations.** Dr. Empey may be correct in his opinion that juvenile courts have gotten off the track with the "just deserts" approach to delinquency but I believe that this criticism is just too general. The juvenile courts of this country have an 85-year tradition of prescribing individual dispositions for the cases coming before them. **Perhaps the pendulum has swung more to the law-and-order approach with crimes of**

**violence and drug involvement but these cases still do not represent the majority coming before the juvenile courts.**

While judges and other court personnel remain prepared to handle the majority of young people appearing before them in the traditional way, I don't think this has been true of the schools in recent years. **I don't know if this country's taxpayers can afford to return to the pre-World War II system of small schools but certainly it would be money well-spent to establish some schools for kids with special needs. At one time, I favored the idea of large schools because I felt that they could offer a much broader curriculum to the students. I've since decided that this advantage is far outweighed by the loss of control and loss of the personal touch these schools have suffered.**

**The courts come in contact with only a fraction of the kids who need help. The schools have had all of them in their embrace at one time or another. Some educators will say, "We can't be baby-sitters, and we can't replace the parents." My answer is they have to if there is to be any hope.**

Ideally, the family-school-peer group-neighborhood is the chain along which the child will move from childhood to adulthood. **The parent-child relationship is the most important link in that chain. Unfortunately, it's usually the weakest link with delinquents and none of us has been very successful in strengthening it in most cases.** If the schools can meet the challenge I have suggested here, I believe that the chain can be reforged to strengthen or replace that link.

Don't misunderstand me. **I don't think we should give up on the family. I agree with Travis Hirschi, who notes that, "Since**

**parents number in the millions, work for nothing, are stuck with the job, and usually prefer law-abiding children, they are a potential resource we cannot afford to ignore." I just don't believe we are able to "reform" parents.** In many cases, the parent is beyond redemption due to mental health problems, alcohol problems, drug addiction, and the like. The problems of the parents are insoluble in many cases. There must be outside positive forces injected into the life stream of the child, and the greater part of that force will have to come from the schools.


**References**

**Daedalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences** *(Fall 1981).*

*Hirschi, Travis. "Families and Crime,"* **The Wilson Quarterly** *VII (2). (Spring 1983): pp. 132-139.*

*President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice.* **Task Force Report: Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime.** *Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967.*

*Wilson, James Q. and Herrnstein, Richard.* **Crime and Human Nature.** *(Simon and Schuster), reviewed in* **TIME Magazine** *(October 21, 1985): p. 94.*

**Wilson Quarterly** *VI (4), (Autumn 1982).*

*"Delinquency in a Birth Cohort II: Some Preliminary Results." Study prepared for the Attorney General's Task Force on Violent Crime, Chicago, Illinois, June 17, 1981.*

# The Family and Delinquency:
## A Critique

*Judith Cassetty*

I shall critique the Empey paper by briefly summarizing its many strengths, identifying its few limitations, and amplifying its implications for policy and practice.

Let me begin by noting the obvious: Dr. Empey's task was hardly easy. To summarize centuries of theory and research findings on the causes of juvenile delinquency while sifting out the most relevant ones in an era of such dynamic social change is tantamount to maintaining a firm stance on a sandy beach during a typhoon. Dr. Empey has succeeded to an admirable extent in producing a summary that is scholarly, well-organized, highly readable, and objective. What limitations there may be in his effort are more likely attributable to constraints of time and space rather than conceptual in nature.

Dr. Empey's absence of attempts to develop precise definitions of the terms "family" and "delinquency" initially troubled me as the interrelationships between them constitute the dominant theme of his paper. As I dwelled upon these definitional problems and how I might have resolved them myself, **I recalled the on-going academic debate which arose over a working definition of the family during the planning for a national conference on the family that was to have occurred under the Carter administration.** The conference was finally cancelled due to the sponsors' inability to reconcile the demands of various diverse groups such as those favoring and opposing a woman's right to choose abortion, gay and lesbian rights organizations, and men's and fathers' rights groups. In the final analysis, **I concluded that it was probably both wise and necessary for Dr. Empey to avoid attempting a definition of the "family."** In his paper, he successfully allows the

functional elements of the inherent notion of family to override restrictions that would have been placed upon a definition comprised of gender roles, legal relationships, geographic proximity, or the like.

Similarly, Dr. Empey avoids the pitfalls he would have encountered by attempting to develop a precise, universal definition of "delinquency." Instead, his analysis clearly implies that the definition is dependent upon community and social standards at any given point in time or place and largely irrelevant to the task at hand, i.e., that of determining what intimate forces (or the lack thereof) in some persons' lives cause them to make youthful choices that are contrary to their best interests and those of society as often defined by law.

**By not attempting to define "family" or "delinquency," Empey doesn't allow irrelevant academic arguments as to the merits of research findings based upon questionable definitions of these terms.** By his implicit definitions, he lets us view the problem of delinquency and its relationship to intimate, nurturing institutions such as the family, school, and community in broader terms. Thus, we can see the opportunity-limiting behavior of adolescent pro-creation as "delinquent," though it may no longer be legally defined as such. I believe this approach is the abiding strength of Empey's paper.

Finally, I would like to commend Dr. Empey for adhering to a view of the family/child relationship while still maintaining a focus upon this unit. In doing so, he reminds us that relationships between parents and their children are not bound by the physical walls of their homes but are intimately interrelated to all other formal and informal social structures. **A continuing theme of so much recent research and theory has been to myopically examine the dyads and triads of "nuclear" family life without recognizing, via empirical design, the absence of reality in such an approach.** Dr. Empey's paper frequently reminds us that the

family's nurturing and caring roles vis-a-vis children are nothing more nor less than that which the larger culture chooses to allow through all of its institutional structures, including legal and judicial ones.

With this background, I shall identify some very minor shortcomings in Dr. Empey's analysis, which mostly spring from admittedly personal and professional bias.

First, having moved several years ago from the Southeastern portion of the United States, where blacks constituted the most significant minority group, to the Southwestern portion, where Hispanics occupy that position, I am particularly sensitive to analyses such as Dr. Empey's that fail to recognize this latter group. **While one cannot dispute the historical justification for concern that black Americans bear a disproportionate share of all major social problems, there are many important reasons to examine more closely the incidence of these problems within our Hispanic populations.** Among them are the following:

—**The Hispanic population as a whole promises to be the largest of our minority populations by the turn of the century** (Newsweek, 1983);

—This population, made up largely of first and second-generation native-born, presents special problems related to acculturation, education, and political participation;

—While, in general, poverty rates are lower in Hispanic households than in black households, **poverty rates among Hispanic children in female-headed families are higher than in comparable black families,** (attributable, at least in part, to both earnings for Hispanic females and higher fertility rates) (U.S. Dept. of Census, 1984), and finally;

—There is some preliminary evidence that suggests that **certain types of crime—particularly juvenile, violent crime, are dispropor-**

**tionately found among Hispanic populations.** This is not surprising given the well-documented fact that school drop-out rates are higher and educational attainment is lower for Hispanic youth than white and black youth (Mayers, 1982).

The above observations appear significant enough to warrant commentary despite recognition that research which disaggregates minority populations thus far has been limited both in scope and by the confounding of categorization which is attributable to race/ethnicity reporting (many Hispanics, particularly Puerto Ricans, identify themselves as black and Hispanic).

My second criticism of Dr. Empey's analysis relates to a more specific generalization that he makes. I hasten to note, however, that I find this perceived inaccuracy on his part to be his *only* generalization that I find insupportable, based upon my review of research in this area.

I refer, specifically, to the following observation: "Yet, continued efforts to extend ever greater rights to every individual (in society) seemed inevitably to decrease the capacity of informal moralnets, such as the family or the school, to exercise the kinds of social control upon which every society depends so heavily for the maintenance of order. It is probably no accident, therefore, that crime rates rose dramatically, during the same period (the 1960's and 70's), and that they remain at unacceptable levels today."

**His statements imply that there is somehow a *causal* relationship between the rise in the activisim of social movements—such as civil rights, women's rights, children's rights, gay rights, and Grey Panther movement—and the weakening of the fiber of the aforementioned moralnets, such as the family and the school.** Graphically, this paragraph suggests the following causal relationship:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Social Movements seeking to foster narrow, individual rights | Family breakdown and dysfunction | Anti-social and/or delinquent behavior |

This assertion as to such a causal relation is not only empirically insupportable but dangerous as well. **There is no reliable evidence that attributes the measurable evidence of family breakdown (e.g., juvenile crime, marital dissolution, family violence, etc.) to these political movements directly or indirectly. If anything, the *opposite* causal relationships may be more significant.** That is, the rise in these social movements may be attributable more to the *failure* of traditional institutional supports or the recognition of the mythology of political and social rhetoric affecting individual and family life in this country. In fact, virtually all of Dr. Empey's review of the literature relating juvenile delinquency to family life argues against his causal assertion. That is, the evidence he provides endorses the more supportable conclusion that the larger social problems of poverty, income inequality, and its antecedents of racism and sexism, are of more determinant importance. The causal relationship that he posits is ill-founded to the extent that these more pervasive, institutionalized problems give rise to the aforementioned social movements. **The relationships Dr. Empey seems to suggest in this one paragraph appear out of sync with his larger view.**

I would suggest, rather, that larger social problems such as unequal economic and occupation opportunity, educational deficiencies, and inadequate institutional mechanism for socialization give rise to both a politically unacceptable social behavior *and* the politically acceptable social movements that Empey's paper identifies. **However, I do not intend to imply that all of the issues that these various groups identify or perceive as salient accurately represent reality. As a special case in**

**point, I refer to the rhetoric of some fathers' rights groups that base many of their demands for greater post-divorce control over their children and former spouses' lives in terms of personal and legal judicial "bias" which favors mothers.** While I wholly discredit such reasoning, I nonetheless would suggest that these complaints and demands did not arise in a social vacuum however poorly perceived and articulated. I would further suggest that closer examination of the institutional structures that define parental roles both within marriage and after its cessation might be instructive in helping us to understand the real source of these men's discontent and might further offer an important clue as to how we might better preserve the father/child bond after divorce.

Finally, I perceive that **Dr. Empey underemphasizes the importance he attributes to economic forces that shape family life.** Again, this is my own bias speaking, as he certainly acknowledges the importance of these economic forces. **In fact, he admirably puts another nail in the coffin of that persistent assertion that juvenile crime is the consequence of marital disruption.** Fortunately, most scholars, especially those skilled in the application of more sophisticated research methodologies, have now discovered that the relationship between delinquency and marital dissolution or illegitimacy is spurious rather than causal. **The real villain here is inadequate income.** Without attempting to define "adequacy" of family income, I will refer simply to the official 1985 U.S. Poverty Guidelines which form the basis for determining eligibility for a shrinking number of Federal public transfer programs such as Foodstamps:

1985 Poverty Guidelines for all Contiguous U.S. States
(Based on 1984 Cost Estimates)

| *Household Size* | *Annual Amount* | *Monthly Amount* |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | $ 5,250 | $ 437.50 |
| 2 | 7,050 | 587.50 |
| 3 | 7,850 | 737.50 |
| 4 | 10,650 | 887.50 |
| 5 | 12,450 | 1,037.50 |
| 6 | 14,250 | 1,187.50 |
| 7 | 16,050 | 1,337.50 |

Source: Federal Register Vol. 50, No. 46.

As you contemplate these figures, let me remind you that in no state do welfare payments equal these levels (in Texas they are roughly 20%) and the cash value of Foodstamps seldom closes the gap between AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) benefits and the poverty threshold.

Without belaboring the point, **I ask you to consider the consequences in terms of the daily lives and lifetime prospects of the millions of women and children who live near or beneath such levels for even a relatively short period of time (the average length of time on AFDC is two years).** Further, consider the larger social consequences of these facts:

1. **More than half (55.4%) of all children who resided in female-headed households were poor by official poverty standards in 1983. This is compared with only 10% of children who lived with both parents** (U.S. Dept. of Census, 1984);
2. Most will remain at or near poverty levels for the duration of their minority or until they acquire a stepfather, an increasingly unlikely possibility (Weitzman, 1985); and
3. In 1983, the incidence of poverty for children in female-headed households by race/ethnicity was 47%, 69%, and 71% for white, black, and Hispanic children,

respectively (U.S. Dept. of Census, 1984).

**Even the elderly fare better in every category as their political constituency grows along with proportional growth in society, thanks to Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, Medicare, and indexed benefits.** Dansiger reports that in 1978, while the elderly comprised only 20% of all households, they received fully 60% of all cash transfers (Dansiger, 1982). In contrast, households with children, which accounted for about 40% of all households, received only 23% of all cash transfers. This "pro-aged tilt" would be further exacerbated if we accounted for the cash value of Medicare and Medicaid benefits received disproportionately by the aged and if we accounted for more recent increases in the numbers and proportions of poor children and the curtailment of transfer programs earmarked for children.

What does this mean?

**The short-term effects of this type of poverty paint an appalling picture:**

- **escalating non-marital birth rates among adolescent girls, with the greatest increases in the very youngest category—those 13-15 years of age;**
- continuing, intolerably high, school drop-out rates among teenagers, especially minorities;
- **the continuation of a two-decade decline in student performance on standardized, national achievement tests (with only very recent evidence of a possible reversal in this trend);**
- unprecedented rates of rejection for military service; and
- **evidence of a widening gap between the skills and knowledge possessed by young entrants to the labor market and those required by today's employers.**

**If this short-term picture is alarming, the longer-term picture is even more so.** It has

been estimated that every four employed persons are presently supporting one unemployed or retired person —adult or child—through the current system of cash and in-kind transfers. If this trend continues, it is anticipated that **by the year 2020** (about the time most of us here will require maximum economic, medical, and social support) **every two workers will be supporting one non-worker.** There are two major points I wish to make here. The first is that unless we upgrade the skills of the future work force our whole society is facing a severe crisis in the form of a growing disparity between economic need and available resources. The second is that **a failure to adopt, as a top priority, a national agenda for enhancing the economic productivity and social functioning of our children will result in the most dramatic alteration in the quality of life in this country that we have ever experienced—and during the lifetime of those present at this conference.**

In conclusion, I would like to expand upon Dr. Empey's suggestions for translating desirable social "ideologies into our educational, economic, political, and legal structures..." I agree whole-heartedly with his final suggestion that "despairing invocations of just deserts" are entirely insufficient for the scope of the task at hand, though they certainly have their place. A vastly more comprehensive plan is called for. **I would suggest that we consider an over-all strategy that would begin by identifying the specific behaviors that we wish to encourage among our adolescent children.** A short, preliminary list might include:

1. **The absence of non-marital births among young women** up to the age of majority or until graduation from high-school;
2. **The successful completion of a specified course of training and education,** matched with individual aptitude and labor market realities;
3. The participation in service-oriented, extra-curricular

community projects; and, of course,

4. Compliance with specific rules, codes, and laws governing the institutions with which the child is affiliated.

**The second part of the strategy would involve developing a plan to provide immediate rewards and incentives for achieving a given level of attainment of the above,** e.g., payments to young girls twelve years of age or over who did not give birth at any time during the previous accounting period. This plan could be targeted at those populations determined to be at greatest risk for youthful childbirth—the disadvantaged—and coupled with educational progress requirements. Another experiment might entail guaranteed part-time jobs for teens while enrolled full-time in school or approved training programs.

**The third part of the strategy would entail developing an implementation plan, including rules for participation.** For instance, in the anti-natal example, participation might need to be voluntary, include parental consent, and require attendance at "family life" workshops from time to time.

The above suggested strategy (issues of economic feasibility aside), is predicated on three basic assumptions. First, that immediate economic incentives and rewards are more apt to get desired results among identified, "at-risk" juvenile populations than are vague promises of full participation in the American Dream if they play a game that has equally vague rules of participation. Second, that it is easier for this youthful population to work toward achievement of short-term, specific, positively-construed goals with tangible milestones than to work toward long-term, lofty goals in the face of an immediate reality that makes a mockery of such aspirations. Third, that **we already possess enough knowledge about the antecedents of and contributors to juvenile crime to be able to at least begin to develop strategies of the sort described here.** We know, **for instance,** that **having a baby during adoles-**

**cence is the single most socially and economically limiting thing that a young woman can do**—with implications for her entire lifetime, that of her child, and for society as a whole.

I do not mean to suggest that the above strategy is either a panacea or without feasibility problems. It is merely an idea for an approach that argues for positively-structured corrective strategies that take cognizance of youthful reality, especially that of the youth at greatest risk for delinquency. **It argues against placing much reliance upon admonishing parents to make their children do their homework, supervise their children's social activities, or provide them with proper values.**

Whenever I hear suggestions for reducing delinquency that are founded on the theory that altering family and individual values will produce the desired, law-abiding behaviors in children, I am reminded of one of the most important social lessons we've learned during the two decades since passage of the Civil Rights Act. During the years of the civil rights movement and activities which preceded the Act's passage and implementation, one frequently encountered articulate, compelling, and even well-intentioned arguments that suggested that changed attitudes and values were necessary pre-conditions to making people behave differently toward one another. "You can't just pass a law that makes people like one another." "Behavioral change is unenforceable if people's values aren't changed first through education." **Hogwash. What we learned, a fact well-documented by the political scientist Thomas Dye, is that changing the way people act, encouraging (even coercing) desirable behaviors, can and does substantially alter values and attitudes** (Dye, 1981). **And in this example, an opportunity structure for a major segment of the population was fundamentally altered, hopefully forever.** Majority behavior toward minorities was changed, and altered attitudes

followed. Thus, the legal groundwork paved the way for real equality of opportunity through changed attitudes.

I am suggesting that there is an important lesson here that can be applied to the population at-risk for juvenile delinquency. Behaviors consistent with conforming, achievement-oriented daily life can be rewarded in a way that can alter the life-long opportunity structure for certain youth. At the very least, application of the principle is worthy of discussion and possible experimentation. It is by no means the ultimate or sole solution to the highly complicated problem of delinquent behavior, but could prove promising on a limited scale or a small part of a comprehensive national strategy to address this very serious social problem.

Such a comprehensive social strategy would require both public and private initiatives and a commitment to exploring new approaches to ameliorating the root causes of delinquency. We need desperately to reevaluate our income maintenance system, for instance, as it effects our children's life chances. It is time for a reexamination of proposals to replace the present system of "cash and in-kind transfers" to families with a "graduated income transfer program" such as those proposed under the Nixon and Carter Administrations. The existing system does not promote either self-support or family stability.

In sum, we must take steps to improve the immediate economic environment and opportunity structure for children instead of relying upon wistful exhortations for the "postponement of gratification" in the vague hope that they will thus take their place in the mainstream of adult life. Such a naive view ignores the consequences of the humiliation and stress entailed in the day-to-day struggle for survival which is the lot of the vast majority of the families from which delinquents come.

**References**

*Dansiger, Sheldon. "Children in Poverty: The Truly Needy Who Fall Through the Safety Net."* **Children and Youth Services Review** *4 (1 and 2) (1982): p. 38.*

*Dye, Thomas.* **Understanding Public Policy.** *Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1981.*

*Mayers, Raymond Sanchez. "The School and Labor Force Status of Hispanic Youth: Implications for Social Policy."* **Children and Youth Services Review** *4 (1 and 2) (1982): pp. 175-191.*

*"Money, Income and Poverty Status of Families and Persons in the United States: 1983."* **Current Population Reports** *Series P-60 (145) Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Census, August, 1984.*

**Newsweek** *(July 4, 1983): p. 14.*

*Weitzman, Lenore.* **The Divorce Revolution.** *New York: Free Press, 1985.*

# The Family as an Adaptable and Enduring Social Unit:

## A Case for Assessing Delinquent Behavior from a Family Systems Perspective

*Leah S. Taylor*

### The Orientation of the Family Systems Therapist

*Circular vs. Linear Thinking*

**During the first half of the twentieth century, notions concerning the etiology of deviant behavior were mechanistic and reductionistic. Deviance was perceived as evolving from an individual's genetic structure, from his physiological imperfections, or from defects in his intrapsychic development.** Freudian explanations which described symptomatic behavior as resulting from repressed trauma in an individual's past or from aberrant parenting which retarded a child's development placed the focus for treatment on the individual. **Efforts to treat the delinquent focused exclusively on redirecting his thinking, uncovering the repressed feelings he was purportedly "acting out," and remolding his behavioral responses.** A specific cause created a specific result which could be treated by engaging the delinquent in psychotherapeutic dialogue or by removing the delinquent from environments which had "conditioned" his antisocial behaviors and "reconditioning" him in a new environment. **For example, repressed rage at his mother could result in his stealing hubcaps. His treatment might entail "uncovering" the repressed**

**rage or removing him from the family to a juvenile institution.**

In the 1950's, while sociologists searched for causes in societal ills, certain clinicians, anthropologists, and social scientists turned to the study of living forms in nature for other answers to human problems. They began to look at human behavior holistically, abandoning the Cartesian view that an individual's mind has power and dominion over all his actions (Kraemer, 1982). They perceived that living organisms are governed not only by force, but also by information and relationships (Bateson, 1979) i.e., a child, first kicking his toy and then kicking his mother, will yield two very different results. They perceived behavior as existing within an interactional process.

**As the disenchantment with linear explanations of causation continued, clinical systems theorists began to assert that behavior must be examined within the context of the natural social organization for individuals: the family.** Furthermore, they recognized the family as an organic social system with boundaries, goals, structures, operating principles, and mutually causative interpersonal transactions. Just as living systems in nature are present as interacting and dynamic processes (McHarg, 1971), familes are present as mutually causative systems whose behaviors complement, reinforce, and perpetuate established family interactions (Nichols, 1984). **Within this framework, the locus of malfunction shifts away from the individual. Deviance is seen as integral to the patterning of family relationships. No one event or behavior is perceived as causing another; rather, events and behaviors are linked in a circular manner to other events and behaviors.** The recurring patterns which emerge from this circularity function to maintain family unity (Papp, 1983).

In this framework, **no one individual is "blamed" for the "deviance" of one or more family members. The family system is explored, understood, and accepted, and even the most destructive behaviors of its member(s) are perceived as patterned responses to the family's organization.**

*Delinquency as a Symptom*

The framework of family systems theory views the acts of a delinquent adolescent as serving the need of his family to maintain its integrity. A typical situation which exemplifies this approach might include a father who is laid off from work and grows increasingly depressed, immobilized, and withdrawn from the family. His wife begins to nag at him to become motivated and find work. The more she nags, the more he withdraws; the more he withdraws, the more she nags. A lonely middle son, sensitive and vulnerable to fears caused by the discord in his parents, seeks refuge in a delinquent peer group which burglarizes a convenience store. The delinquent act of his son enrages the father, temporarily bringing him out of his depression and reconnecting him to the family. His wife temporarily stops nagging her husband as both direct their energies toward the son. For a moment in time, the family is once more unified. Then the father realizes that not only is he out of work but he also has a delinquent son about whom to worry, court dates to attend, restitution to supervise. His hopelessness returns and he sinks back into his depression. The wife's nagging returns, and the boy returns to the delinquency of his peers. The sequence of events becomes self-perpetuating; who or what starts the sequence is not relevant since, once started, the sequence repeats itself in never-ending cycle. The symptom, i.e., the boy's criminal behavior, is "opposed, then encouraged, opposed, then encouraged, endlessly" (Hoffman, 1981). The symptom balances the family. The son's actions are a kind of "self-sacrifice" for the good of the group

(Hoffman, 1984). The son sacrifices his pro-social standing in order to bring his parents into harmony. This "homeostatic model" of symptomatology in family systems therapy is based on the principles of cybernetics which explains systems as closed-circuited and self-regulating by means of feedback loops. A therapist subscribing to this model would intervene to change the communication pattern, such as getting the wife to nag less and the husband to withdraw less, thereby establishing a new pattern of responses.

**While useful as a means of analysis, the homeostatic model does not explain the whole picture.** A more recent variant in family systems theory is an evolutionary model which draws from organismic biology. This evolutionary paradigm sees family systems as open to change, differentiation, and adaptation (Dell and Goolishan, 1979). While it still perceives the family as an organic whole, a coherent composite which acts as a unit, the model also sees it as imbedded in its societal context, and exchanging information with it. **The open systems theorist views the family as capable of creativity, spontaneity, and adaptation.** He follows an ecological view, instead of perceiving a closed circuitry whose limited energy gears itself toward homeostasis: while the laws of entropy (i.e., the tendency toward balance, decompensation, and repose) govern the inorganic systems of matter and energy, "negentropy" (creativity and life force) governs living systems (Sears, 1957). **While maintaining equilibrium, successful living systems integrate new information from the environment and adapt in ways that are mutually beneficial for both the organism and the environment** (McHarg, 1971).

The homeostatic model does not explain the variety of ways that a family is capable of responding to its deviant members. **For instance, a Bible-thumping father may see his delinquent son as the devil incarnate and expel him from the**

**family even though that action may cause family discord and imbalance. Once the son is removed from the family, the family must restructure and reorganize. All families must reorganize as generations are born, grow old, and die (Hoffman, 1981); as divorce and remarriage create new family forms; and as social and economic conditions place new demands on the modern family.** In the evolutionary model, deviant behavior is a source of new information for the family system to ingest and reorganize around. Deviance becomes a signal that structural changes may be necessary for the family's survival. In the example of the unemployed and depressed father, the nagging wife, and the delinquent middle son, an "open systems" therapist would interpret the son's delinquency as information that family survival would best be served through a restructuring of roles within the family that better suits the current economic and social conditions. Recognizing that change in one part of the system will affect all parts of the system, this restructuring must consider all of the major players in order to achieve a healthier balance. Such restructuring might take the form of encouraging the mother to seek work and become the "provider" temporarily, encouraging the father to start his own business, and connecting the middle son to the father as his helper in the new enterprise. These structural changes might: relieve the economic stress on the family, reduce the wife's nagging exhortations and her helplessness, resurrect the father to a position of importance, provide a mechanism for the father to reconnect to the family via his son and, at the same time, provide consistent supervision for the youngster. The "symptom" of the boy's delinquency, still tied to dynamics within the family, now becomes the mechanism for a structural change that better fits environmental conditions as opposed to one that maintains a family equilibrium that no longer successfully adapts to a changing environment.

## The Post-Industrial Family

The paradigm of the family as an evolving, open system enables an understanding of the new family forms emerging in our post-industrial, technological society. **The family has changed both structurally and functionally as society has shifted from a labor-intensive, production-oriented, industrial society to a labor-deintensive, machine-based, corporate, consumer-oriented, service-oriented, and technological society.** The changes involve family size and membership, amount and kind of parenting, roles of members, careers, etc. Consisting of two parents and several children, the nuclear family served the needs of a production-oriented industrial society. As its small size, mobility, and source of labor are no longer necessary in today's hi-tech world, other family forms are taking over. **Thomas Walz has identified at least thirteen new family forms including:** 1. the "hotel family" (a family which sleeps in the same house, but whose members go their separate ways), 2. the "expanded family" (communalization, families buying homes together), 3. the "same sex family" (homosexual or "roommate" families), 4. the "genetically controlled" family, 5. the "multiple career" family, and others (Walz and Miller, 1983).

**The most common adaptations besides the nuclear family, that still survive, are: 1. the single parent family with either only one parent involved or with both biological parents living in separate households but both involved with their offspring and 2. the blended family, also known as the "remarried family" or "reconstituted family."** These new family structures have problems endemic to new social forms struggling to survive in a political and economic environment that does not yet fully support them; they all have features that are problematic to parents and to children who are still

expected to accomplish developmental transitions based on old models; and they have their share of juvenile delinquents. Yet they stand as a testament to the strength of the family as an enduring social unit. They prove the point of sociologists that while the family undergoes developmental and structural changes determined by its historical context, it survives in some form (Elder and Runck, 1979). Indeed, if we need not be troubled that divorce determines delinquency (Robins and Yahraes, 1979), and if we can be heartened by the evidence that in father-absent homes the quality of supervision, rather than the quantity, determines the degree of conduct disorders in adolescents (Goldstein, 1984), then we can look at new family forms as potential solutions rather than problems. As families are inventing new ways of being, caseworkers who choose to deal with them as positive contributions to a changing socio-economic terrain are contributing to the viability of new family models (Bateson, 1985).

**This author would not be foolish enough to claim that approaching delinquency from a pure family systems perspective will cure all delinquents.** Social policy makers should, and must, deal with the monumental problems of poverty, racism, sexism, impoverished and unresponsive educational institutions, and the social ills wrought by rapid economic and social change. **On the other hand, the judge, the probation worker, the child protective worker, and the clinician must be able to respond to the immediate dilemma of what to do with a delinquent youngster for whom they have become responsible.** By utilizing a family systems approach, they expand their usual inquiry to include a much broader network of relationships than is normally considered in court-related casework. At the same time, they are dealing with a system that is manageable, meaningful, and replete with information that can direct the caseworker toward a workable intervention.

## Fundamentals of Family Assessment

**Acquiring a careful, thorough family assessment at intake can save a caseworker, his delinquent client, the client's family, and the court considerable time, trouble, and aggravation.** Once the delinquent's behavior is understood within the context of his family, interventions can be more readily designed to reduce contact with the court and decrease utilization of out-of-home placements and institutions. **Even in so-called "monster" cases where clients come from families that are intergenerationally criminal, neglectful, lacking in resources, and resistant to change, a thorough assessment can reveal family themes and behavior patterns that reveal the meaning of the delinquent's behavior within his familial context.** Once that meaning is defined, the caseworker will find it easier to create a service plan that more directly remediates the problem. Individualized plans that seek to interrupt the cycle of family behaviors contributing to the delinquency can often yield more satisfactory results than the "programmed" remedies utilized in many juvenile and family courts (e.g., restitution for theft, institutionalization for violent crime, etc.).

### *Areas of Inquiry*

The caseworker must adopt a mind-set prior to investigating the behaviors, beliefs, and relationships in any family. **This mind-set must put aside the treasured notions of individual and linear causality and see the individual client as part of an interactional framework** that both determines his behavior and is determined by it. Once he is firmly convinced that his client's behavior is imbedded in a relational context which is circularly causative, the caseworker can proceed towards areas of inquiry:

1. **History of the delinquent behavior:** How long has the behavior been going on? What are the family members' attitudes and perceptions of that behavior? What sequence of events led up to the delinquent act? How does the family react after the act is discovered? Have there been other "helpers" associated and networked with the family regarding the antisocial behavior of the client? If so, have they become part of the family and, hence, of the interactional process?
2. **Precipitating crises:** Are the delinquency and the dysfunctional family interactions the result of a crisis in the family? Such crises can include a sudden illness, a geographical move, changes in family life-style, loss of a member, birth of a child, loss of work, etc.
3. **Family character:** What roles do family members play (parent, wage-earner, peacekeeper, good child, bad child)? What are the family rules (communication style, such as how one is allowed to express anger, expectations regarding levels of achievement, degree of autonomy permitted among members)? What are the family's social and economic goals? What is the family's cultural and adaptive style (e.g., is there a subcultural adaptation that is disconsonant with the normative culture as might be found in migrant workers, refugee families, military families)?
4. **Family ecology:** What is the family's relationship with aspects of the social environment such as school, work, church, police, friends? Is the family closed off and isolated? Or are its boundaries too permeable with over-involvement in relationships outside of the family and under-involvement in relationships with family members?
5. **Family competencies and resources:** What are the family's financial, material, social, and psychological resources? Does this family possess the intellectual ability necessary to organize thoughts and process information? Does this family have the emotional resources to carry through a plan of action? Does this family have the finances to provide trans-

portation for a youngster's involvement in community activities?

6. **Quality of affective expression:** Is the family optimistic or negative? Is the family emotionally expressive? Are family members aware of each others' feelings? Are they emotionally connected or distant?
7. **The Genogram:** The genogram is the most valuable tool to assess a family's evolution and development over time. **It is a pictorial representation of family events and relationships.** It provides a longitudinal perspective, usually including information about three or more generations. It presents data on family life events (births, deaths, divorces, remarriages) and on family emotional connections. It can provide information about age, occupation, race and ethnicity, places of family residences, and religious backgrounds (Holman, 1983). Family patterns emerge from the genogram that visualize for the worker how his client's behavior interweaves with family themes and interactions. (Refer to the sample genogram and explanation of symbols that follows.)

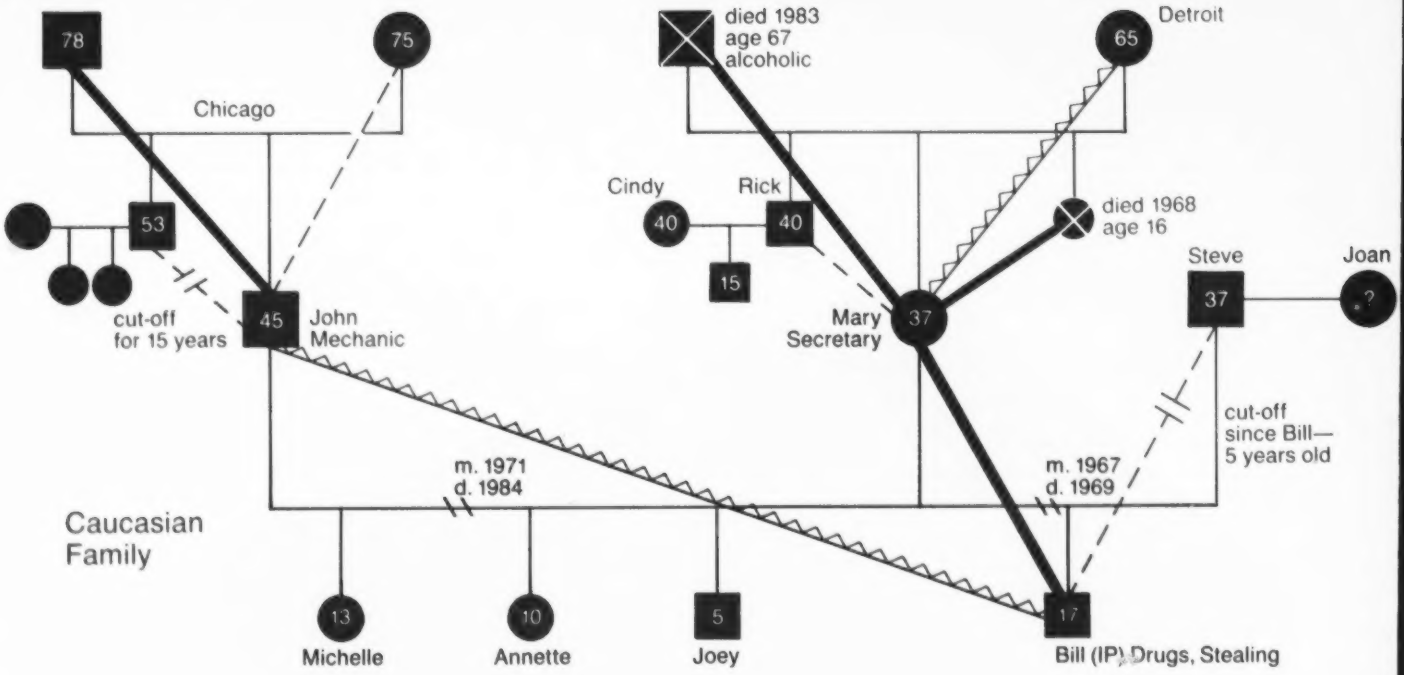
*In this fictitious family, Bill is the "identified patient" (IP), a Caucasian 17-year-old drug abuser and thief. From the genogram we can determine that Mary, Bill's mother, divorced his father when Bill was one year old, and that Bill has not seen his father since he was five years old. Mary remarried in 1971, when Bill was three years old, to John, a mechanic by trade. They had three children, two girls and a boy, and divorced in 1984. The genogram shows that Mary divorced each husband after a death in her family of origin. She divorced Steve one year after the death of her sister, to whom she was close; she divorced John one year after her father, to whom she was also very close, died of a probable alcohol-related illness. Mary has a conflicted relationship with her own mother and is emotionally distant from her brother. Bill is very close to his mother and is in conflict with his stepfather. Both Bill and his stepfather have emotional "cut-offs" in their histories, Bill with his biological father, and John with his 53-year-old-brother. John is*

*emotionally distant from his own mother and very close to his father.*

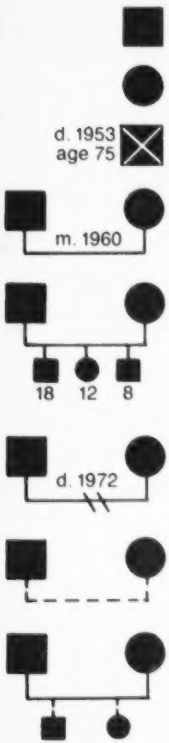
We know nothing more about this family than what the genogram details, but certain themes and patterns emerge: 1. the family has experienced important losses through deaths, emotional cut-offs, and divorces; 2. Mary comes from a chemically-dependent family and was "triangulated" in her relationship to her parents (a child becomes "triangulated" when there is tension in the parental subsystem, and conflict between one parent and child can serve to focus attention away from the covert conflict between the parents); 3. Bill is replicating the themes of the chemical-dependency and triangulation in Mary's family of origin. We might speculate that he is doing so in order to divert Mary's attention from her unbearable losses which, if experienced directly, could immobilize her and threaten the life of the family. His behaviors also have the effect of keeping John connected to the family as well as connecting the step-grandfather who, we might assume, is warmly tied to his grandchildren because of his strong ties to his son. The balance in the family is thus served by Bill's antisocial escalations. Furthermore, they provide information to the family that it will remain dysfunctional until the family more successfully adapts to its present circumstances. Bill's delinquent behavior, then, becomes the harbinger for change. A plan of service for this family might include: 1. developing a therapeutic avenue for Mary to grieve her losses, 2. exploring the possibility of a more supportive tie between Mary and her brother or Mary and her ex-father-in-law, 3. providing divorce counseling for John who knows how to be close and how to be distant, but not how to be "in-between" those polarities, and 4. working with Bill on reconciling his feelings about his biological father and on how to be more productively supportive to his mother while accomplishing the age-appropriate task of separation.

**The genogram is an indispensable assessment tool for a family in conflict. It allows for the organization of large**

## Sample Genogram



## Genogram Symbols




Male

Female

Death
(give date & age)

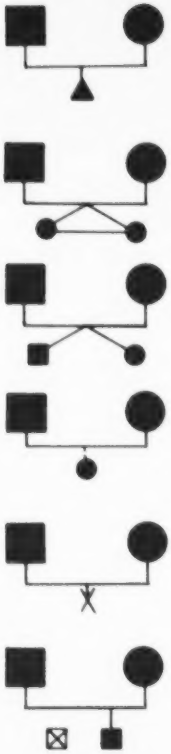
Marriage
(give date)

Children
(list in birth order with
oldest on left)

Divorce
(give date)

Living Together

Adopted or Foster
Children



Pregnancy

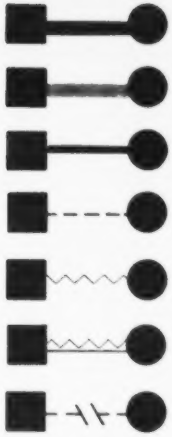
Identical Twins

Fraternal Twins

Spontaneous Abortion

Induced Abortion

Stillbirth



Very close relationship

Somewhat close
relationship

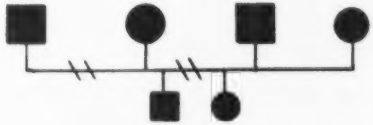
Slightly close
relationship

Emotionally distant
relationship

Conflictual relationship

Close relationship with
conflict

Estrangement or cut-off



Members of Current
Household

**amounts of data from complicated family histories, it brings into focus the significant events in a family over several generations, it makes visible the "subsystem" interrelationships, and it highlights intergenerational (vertical) patterns (e.g., the chemical dependency in two generations in Mary's family) as well as cross-generational (horizontal) patterns (e.g., the cut-offs in both Bill's and John's experiences).** Most importantly, it facilitates the process of shifting the focus from the "identified patient" to the "suprasystem" for both the family and the caseworker and educates them to think systematically (Sager, 1983).

In the case examples that follow, the use of the genogram will be highlighted as pivotal to the assessment process. Cases chosen exemplify delinquency in each of the three most common post-industrial family forms. These case examples have been drawn from agencies to which the author consults. Names, dates, events, and some relationships have been altered to protect the confidentiality of these families. However, the alterations keep intact the thematic and relational truths of these families.

## Case One: A Single-Parent Family[1]

Single-parent families, with only one biological parent available to a child, are particularly vulnerable to stress. **The demands on the single parent to play all parental roles—wage earner, housekeeper, and parent—often leave that parent physically and emotionally exhausted and with little reserve to pay close attention to the emotional and social needs of children.** Substandard housing, poverty, and lack of resources exacerbate this condition and further isolate

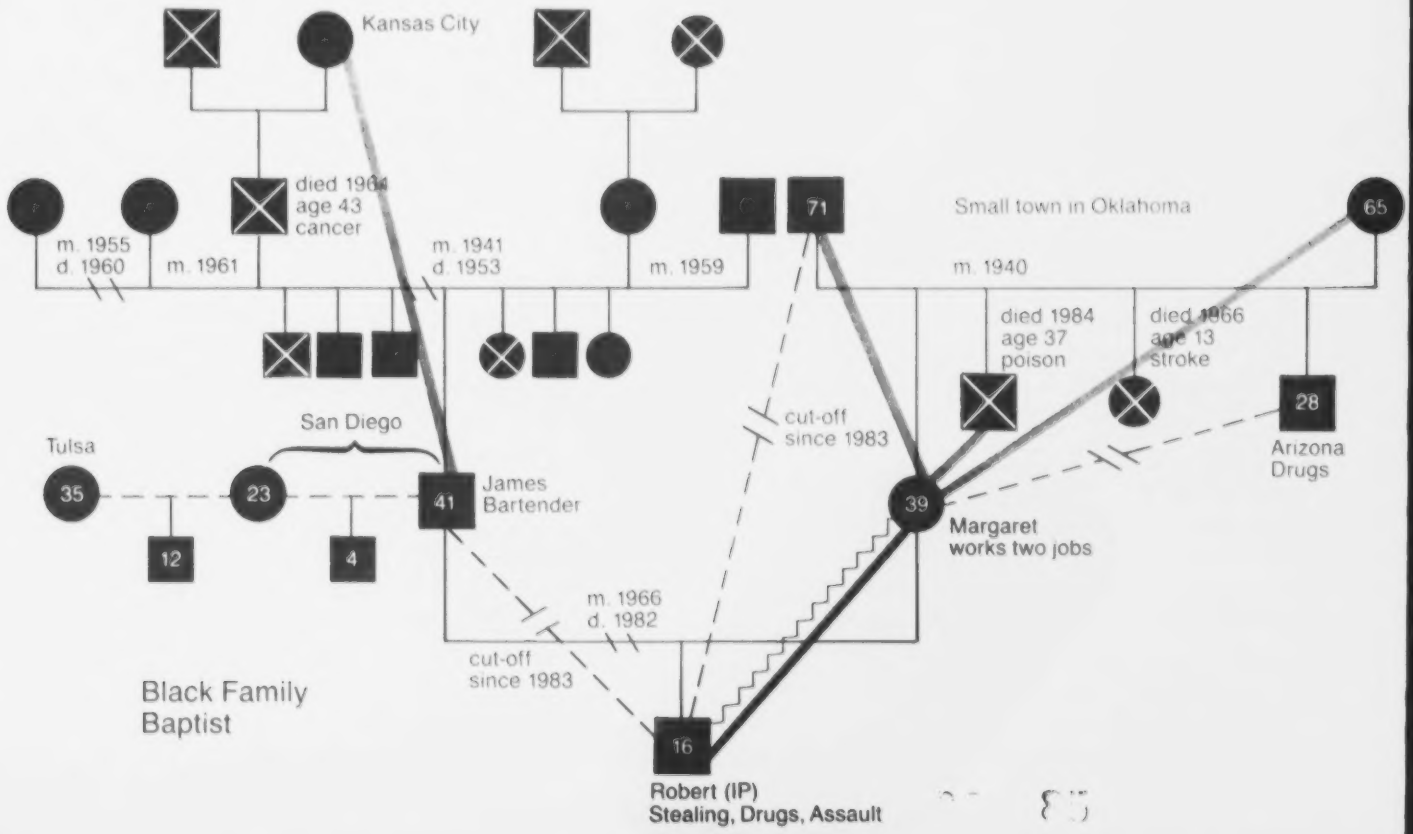
[1]Special acknowledgement to the staffs of the Alternatives to Incarceration and Everest Day Treatment programs, subdivisions of Moore Youth and Family Services in Moore, Oklahoma. Participants included James Grace, Charlotte Lawless, Lisa Williams, Earl Day, and Brenda Cacy.

the parent from potential sources of support. **The lack of support, validation, and feedback from another adult in the family will often cause the single parent to turn to the oldest child for support and assistance. As this child becomes "parentified," it becomes harder for the parent to discipline him.** Because the parent depends on this child to help maintain the well-being of the family, the authority hierarchy of parent to child is threatened. The parent and parentified child become "enmeshed" in a mutually over-dependent relationship. Each fears abandoment by the other and neither is able to achieve separation. As her "surrogate husband" the parentified child is unable to maintain appropriate emotional distance from his mother, and sensing her fragility, will often avoid expressions of anger toward her and is, thereby, denied the modal method most teenagers use for distancing and individuation (Weltner, 1982). The youngster may internalize his rage, become somatic and withdrawn or, as in the case below, direct it toward the world outside the family.

*Robert came to the attention of the court for larceny of merchandise in 1983, one year after the divorce of his parents. Several more incidents involving burglary, concealing stolen property, possession of marijuana, and assaults on peers occurred during the ensuing year. His caseworker placed him in a day treatment program for delinquents in the fall of 1984. Staff members in this program did a family assessment and gathered the following information: Robert's father and mother were married for 16 years. The first three years of their marriage were harmonious, until Robert was born. For the next 13 years, Robert's father abused his wife physically, often severely. From the age of six until his parents' divorce, Robert played the "protector" role with his mother, intervening during his parents' fights by physically assaulting James, his father. The intervention had the effect of diverting his father's rage toward Robert, who would then become the victim of his father's abuse.*

*James had two children out-of-wedlock by two different*

## Genogram: Case One (Single Parent Family)



*women while married to Margaret. Robert has no contact with these half-siblings. When James and Margaret separated, Robert lived with his dad for a while but returned to his mother at the time of the divorce when James moved to San Diego with the mother of his four-year-old son. There has been no contact with James since the spring of 1983.*

*When Margaret divorced, she was forced to take two jobs. At that time she gave up several close relationships with friends with whom she had run a concession booth at a local flea market. She was working at a nursing home from 3:00 p.m.-11:00 p.m. five days a week, and at a packing plant on the weekends from 11:00 p.m.-7:00 a.m. Robert was expected to take over some household chores and guard the mortgaged family home while she was at work. As Robert's delinquency and drug use escalated, Margaret increased her demands on Robert to maintain order and cleanliness in the home. Robert would comply for a time, then resume his rebellious behaviors. She described Robert as her "baby" whom she feared losing, and whom she would not allow to leave home until he became "responsible." She repeated several times "I'll raise that kid until he's 18 if it kills me!" When Robert was delinquent or assaultive, Margaret initially was enraged and they argued. Then Margaret would soften and the two became loving and close until the next incident, when the cycle would repeat.*

Several themes and patterns emerged from the case information and the genogram: 1. Robert and his mother were enmeshed in a mutually over-dependent relationship typical of single parents and parentified children. Robert's role was predetermined by his already enmeshed "protector" relationship with his mother. 2. Robert's delinquent, assaultive, and drug abuse incidents had the effect of creating emotional distance between him and his mother and allowed them "breathing space." Their mutually reciprocal needs would then cause a rapproachement and a period of closeness ensued which alleviated their mutual fears of abandonment for a time. Robert's behavior, then, performed the dual function of separation

and closeness and preserved the mother and son's perception of themselves as a defined family. 3. Margaret had experienced serious losses with two of her siblings, and was cut off from her remaining brother who was a "bad actor" with problems similar to Robert's. 4. James, the father, probably developed an overdependent relationship with his paternal grandmother after his parents divorced, a pattern repeated by Robert with his mother. 5. James came from a family with numerous divorces and multiple partners, while Margaret came from a family in which the marriage of parents was stable and hers was the only marriage in her sibling subsystem. Robert was experiencing conflict in his need to identify with his father and "break out," while carrying the burden of having to remain "faithful" to his mother and preserve some stability in the family. 6. Margaret is very close to her parents but separated from them by geographical distance. Robert became "cut off" from his maternal grandfather after his parents divorced, probably because of his identification struggles. His rejection of the maternal grandfather was his way of maintaining his identity with his father.

The plan of service developed for this family included the following: 1. to effect separation, placing Robert in a residential drug treatment program with a black male aftercare therapist who could become a surrogate father to Robert and a nurturing guide to Margaret; 2. assisting Margaret in finding a boarder to help make the mortgage payments, place another adult in the home, provide some companionship to Margaret, and enable Margaret to give up her weekend night work; 3. restoring Margaret's ties with her friends in the concession booth at the flea market; 4. developing long-range goals for reconnecting Robert emotionally with his maternal grandfather. This plan had the goal of breaking the repetitive cycle maintaining the enmeshment between Robert and his mother; of enabling separation so that both Robert and Margaret could deal with their identity issues, their individually-felt losses, and their need to make their separate life transitions; and of creating the possiblility for more

appropriate bonding between mother and son.

## Case Two: A Blended Family[2]

Blended families are created by the marriage or living together of two partners, one or both of whom have been married and then divorced or widowed, and one or both of whom have children from previous marriages. This family form has a constellation of people and relationships created through the divorce and remarriage process: former spouses, the new spouses of former spouses, family of origin members for all adults in the blended family (sets of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.), and children of the new relationship as well. The blended family can assume many structural forms depending on the number of marriages, children, etc. (Sager, 1983).

**One of the problems often facing a blended family is the new marriage partner's on-going idealization of the intact nuclear family. The new husband and wife team will often attempt to replicate nuclear family expectations of the roles of father, mother, and children.** When this strategy inevitably fails, they experience a lack of control, role confusion, and feelings of failure. Goals for a caseworker working with such a family are: 1. to consolidate the remarried couple as a functioning unit by analyzing the "suprasystem" (the network of relationships) and utilizing individuals within the suprasystem to consolidate parental authority; 2. to create co-parenting situations with biological parents where possible; 3. to assist children with loyalty bonds; 4. to facilitate unfinished mourning for the losses that divorces create; and 5. to secure a place for a child's development by utilizing appropriate resources within the suprasystem until the child can bond with the new step-parent (Sager,

[2]Special acknowledgement to Mark Masters, M.S.W., Coordinator for the Moore Family Institute, a subdivision of Moore Youth and Family Services in Moore, Oklahoma. Mr. Masters was the principal investigator and therapist for this case.

1983). Some of these principles are utilized in the case history below.

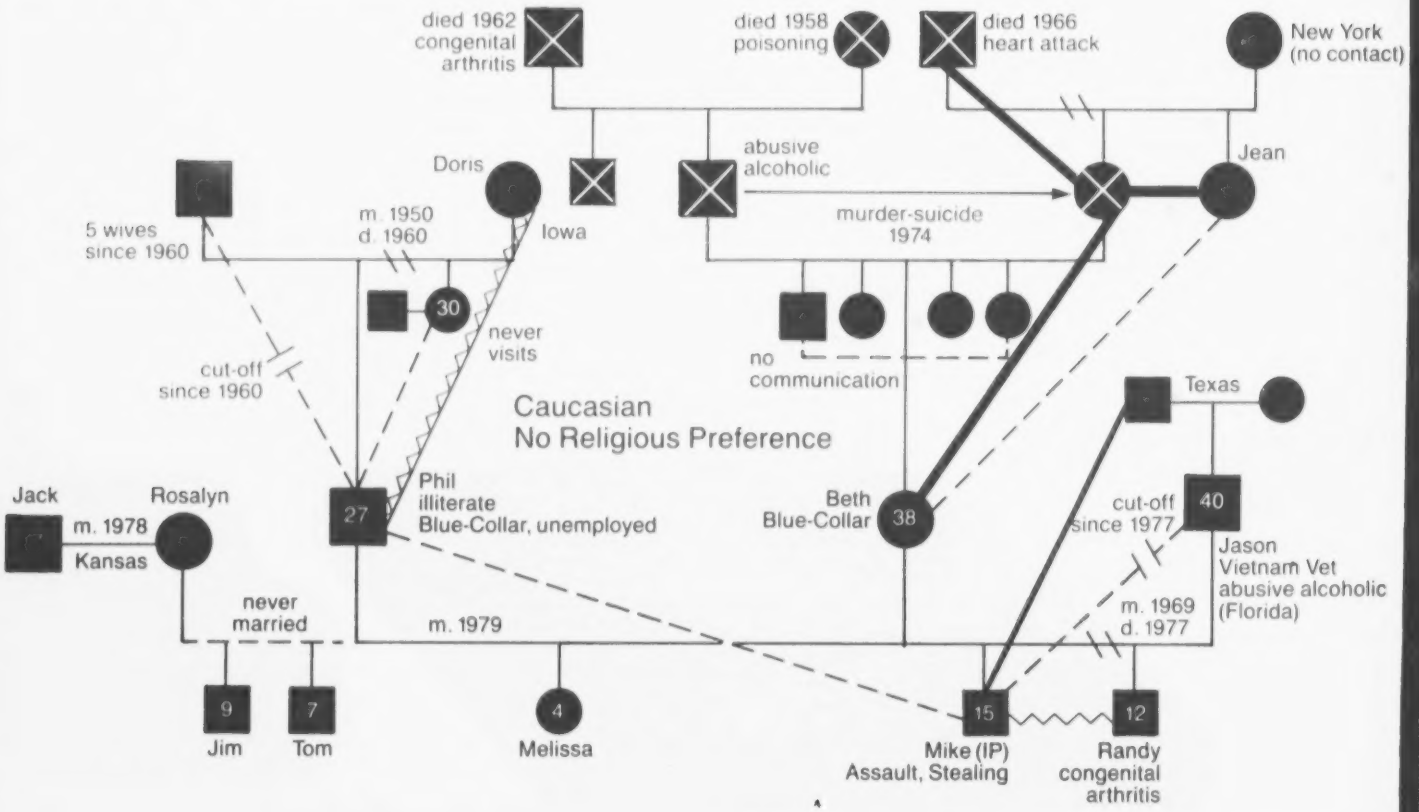
*Mike, a Caucasian 15-year-old boy, came to the attention of the court for assaulting a younger boy in the neighborhood and stealing another boy's bicycle at school. He had also been truant for several months and had recently beaten his brother, Randy, to the extent that Randy required medical attention. Beth and Phil, Mike's "blended" parents, described family problems and were referred to a family therapy institute for assessment and treatment.*

*Beth and Phil met each other at the clothing manufacturing plant where they both worked. Beth liked Phil because he was a good provider and appeared "stable" in comparison to her first husband who had repeatedly attacked her physically. During those attacks, Mike had played the role of her "protector" by calling the police. This intervention would calm his father, causing an apology to his mother and a temporary harmony. When his parents divorced, his father moved to Florida and never contacted his children again.*

*Mike's brother, Randy, was born with congenital arthritis (a genetic inheritance from Beth's paternal grandfather). He is treated in an experimental program in a Texas hospital in the same city where Jason's (Mike's father's) parents reside. Beth remains close to her former in-laws and the whole family stays with them when Randy is in treatment. The family experiences these visits as "fun times." Mike feel close to his paternal grandfather, but complains that distance prevents the attachment he would like. Mike is emotionally distant to Phil, his stepfather.*

*Phil's father deserted his family when Phil was two years old. He grew up a "parentified child" to his mother, and left home at the age of 16 to break the tie. Since then, he and his mother have experienced chronic conflict and, in recent years, they have had little contact. Phil had a girlfriend, Rosalyn, when he was 17. She became pregnant and he supported her and the two children she had by him until she married Jack in 1978. His two*

Genogram: Case Two (Blended Family)



*children visit the family during holidays and summers, but visits have become infrequent in the past two years. Phil is a "man's man" who does not show affection to his children, wrestles with the boys, and believes that Mike should respect his authority. Mike never obeyed Phil but had been willing to obey his mother until recently. Now that Beth has lost control, she wants Phil to be "stronger" and control Mike. Each time Mike becomes disorderly, Beth exhorts Phil to act; Phil responds by withdrawing, and the pattern repeats. Beth's demands on Phil were occurring at the same time that Phil became unemployed and did not appear "strong" at any level.*

The family history and the genogram demonstrate several themes and family patterns. 1. Death, illness, cut-offs, and emotional distance are themes for this blended family. Beth's family of origin as well as her family with Jason, is marked by illness, death, abuse, alcoholism, the murder-suicide of her parents, cut-offs and no communication among living relatives. Phil also is cut-off from his family of origin and is becoming more distant from the children he had with Rosalyn. 2. Both Mike and Phil were "parentified children" and share a mutual lack of knowledge concerning how to be either parent or child. Mike's father deserted him just as Phil's father had done. 3. Mike's longing for a relationship with his paternal grandfather mirrors Beth's longing for the relationship she once had with her maternal grandfather, a loss which we speculate, she never resolved, based on her cutting off contact with that side of her family after he died. 4. Mike's recent aggressive behaviors perform dual functions of diverting attention from a growing dissatisfaction in his mother's marriage and acting out Beth's desire for Phil to become more assertive and "take control" by behaving like his father when his father needed to be in control. His actions have the effect of keeping the family together by focusing on him, as well as signaling his family that a change in the structural and emotional composition of the family is now imperative.

The plan of service for this family included four directives: 1. Phil was directed to spend his days repairing and renovating the family home until he could find employment again in order to restore his usefulness to the family, using Beth's frame of reference. 2. Beth was encouraged to see the family therapist in individual sessions to talk about her losses and help her resolve some of her ambivalence about her marriage. 3. Beth was directed to arrange for Mike to talk to his paternal grandfather by phone twice a week. Mike was to put Phil on the phone during these calls and Phil was directed to ask the paternal grandfather for advice on how to handle Mike's need for attention and discipline. The paternal grandfather and Phil, then became a "co-parenting team." Beth was instructed to support the directives of this new "co-parenting team" and to reward her son with special attention when he followed those directives. 4. Mike, Randy, and Phil were instructed to wrestle together once a day, interchanging the wrestler and "referee" roles since "fighting" represented closeness in this family.

Other issues are important for this family to address at some point such as Phil's age and lack of maturity, Mike's unresolved anger toward his father, Phil's need to reconnect with his other children, and Beth's unresolved issues around physical aggression and love in relationships. But the first order was to establish a new balance and interrupt the dysfunctional behavioral cycle. This task was accomplished by bringing in a new support for the parental team (one which connects the "longed for" grandfather to both Beth and to Mike, and allows Phil the fatherly advice he never had); by providing an appropriate outlet for aggression and closeness; and by giving Beth an opportunity to recognize that her past losses need not replicate into future ones.

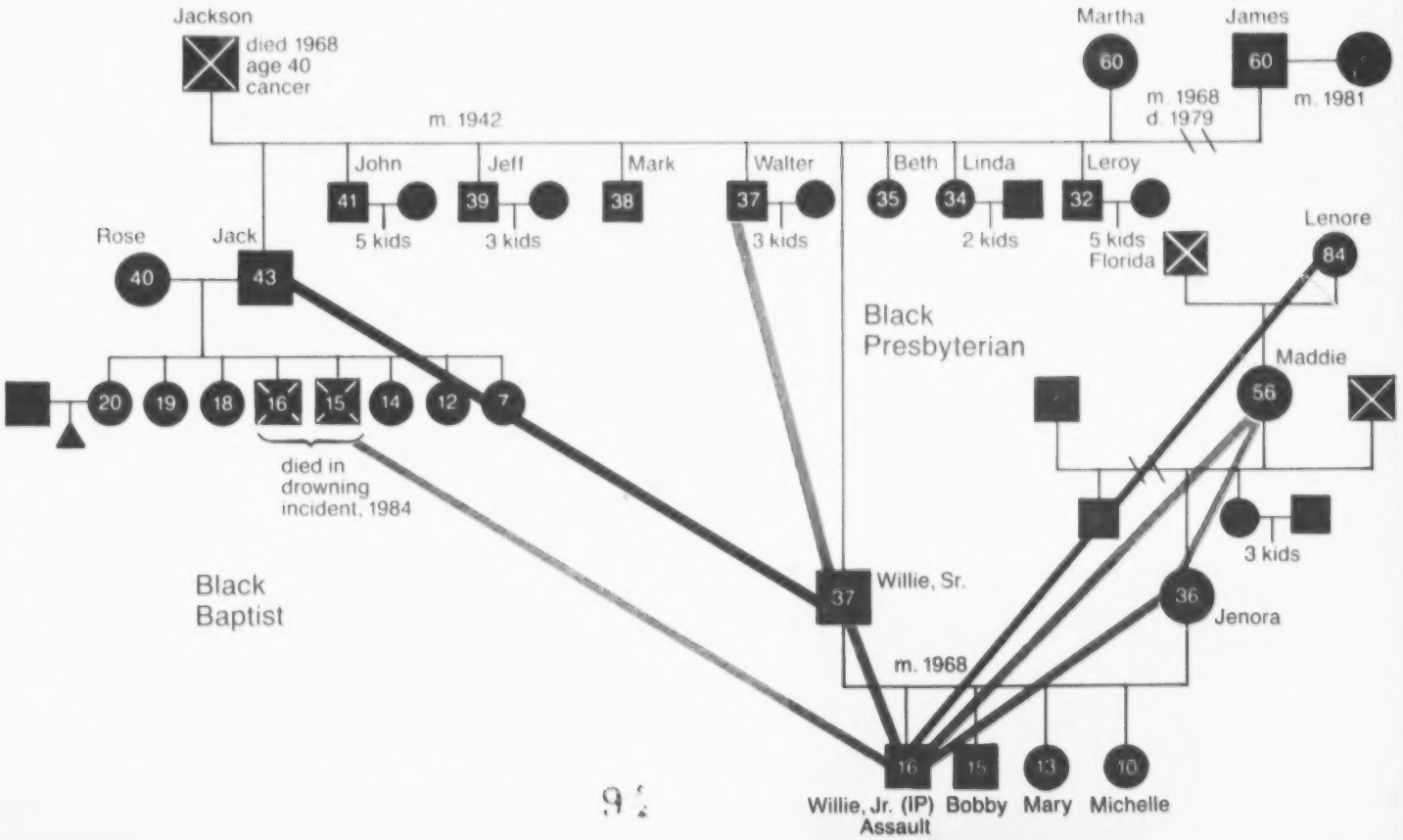
## Case Three: A Nuclear Family[3]

**Nuclear families are still alive and surviving in post-industrial society. The following case exemplifies what a family assessment can accomplish in an intergenerationally criminal family in which the identified patient's criminality was seen as firmly imbedded and untreatable by court, caseworker, and the client himself.**

*Willie, Jr., a black 16-year-old youth, arrived at a maximum security juvenile training school two weeks after shooting in the forearm a man who threatened his father, Willie, Sr., in a park near his home. This event occurred a week after the funeral for two cousins who died in a drowning incident. When Willie, Jr. was 14, his father had gone to prison for shooting a man during an argument. Willie, Sr. was extremely close to his own family of origin. When he went to prison, his brother, Jack took on the role of caring for Willie, Sr.'s family. Jack had been a parentified child, taking the role of father in Willie, Sr.'s family when the paternal grandfather, Jackson, was ill with cancer. At the same time, in an apparent move to become part of Jack's family and bond Jack to Willie, Sr.'s family, Willie, Jr. joined the delinquent peer culture of his two cousins, Jack's sons (who later died), and began a career of shoplifting and petty larceny. When Willie, Sr. returned to the home 18 months later, Willie, Jr. began to argue with his cousins and ended up shooting at one of them to get them away from the family property. This event could be seen as Willie, Jr.'s way of acting out his father's need to disconnect his brother, Jack, from the authority role he had assumed, and re-establishing himself as the head of the household.*

[3]Special acknowledgement to Pete Dominic, social worker at a state-run secure facility for juveniles in Oklahoma. Special acknowledgement, also, to the Superintendent there, Wilbur Williams, whose commitment to working with families enabled special use of facility space and staff time needed to work effectively with this family.

Genogram: Case Three (Nuclear Family)



*Willie, Sr.'s extended family had a long history of chronic criminality. Most of Willie, Sr.'s brothers had spent time in prison, and most of Willie, Jr.'s paternal cousins had been through the juvenile system or were in it. The family was known to authorities in both of Oklahoma's major metropolitan areas. When Willie, Jr.'s assault case came before the juvenile court judge, court personnel saw the youngster as "just another criminal" in a long line of criminals from this family and sent him to a secure juvenile facility. Yet, on closer inspection, the social worker at the facility discovered that while the paternal side of the family was, indeed, "criminal," the maternal side had no criminality whatsoever. The only progeny on the maternal side of the family to have had a delinquent history was Willie, Jr.*

Interviews with the nuclear family and with the grandmother, Maddie, with whom Willie, Jr. had shared a warm relationship prior to his delinquency, revealed that when Willie, Sr. went to prison, his wife, Jenora, became dependent on the support of Jack's family. To some degree, she disconnected with her family of origin. Willie, Jr. helped consolidate the attachment by becoming one of Jack's "delinquent children." When Willie, Sr. returned, Jenora experienced a loyalty conflict: even though she knew Jack's children were a "bad influence" on her son, she could not bring herself to disconnect them. Nor could Willie, Sr. effectively disconnect Jack and his family because of his gratitude to them for supporting his family while he was in prison. Willie, Jr. acted out his parents' wishes for Willie, Sr. to resume authority when he shot at his cousins, effecting anger and separation between the two families, and disconnecting Jack from the authority position. He then reconsolidated his identity with that of his father by shooting a man with whom his father was arguing, replicating the crime which sent his father to prison and then, like his father, going to "prison." Thus, he validated his father's identity and elevated his father's status within the family, since Willie, Jr. was now the "bad guy." Willie, Jr.'s "problem" became the family's

"solution." **Willie, Jr. is a classical example of a youngster who will unconsciously "sacrifice" himself in order to reunify a disorganized and dysfunctioning family.**

Given this new perspective, a plan was put into action: 1. Willie, Jr. was assisted in "working through" the level system at the juvenile facility as quickly as possible. 2. Jenora, who did not wish to side against her husband's family because of her loyalty to her husband, allowed her mother, Maddie, to take that position with Willie, Jr. Maddie was given the task of monitoring Willie, Jr.'s contacts with the paternal family. 3. Willie, Sr. who could not personally commit to staying away from the negative influences in this family, agreed to act as the "gate-keeper" in his household, i.e., while he maintained contact with his family outside of the home, he made sure that the most antisocial members of his family were kept out of his home and out of the lives of his children. 4. Willie, Sr. recruited and Maddie approved a 22-year-old cousin (a son of John, Willie, Sr.'s second-oldest brother, recently out of jail and committed to "going straight") to act as a "big brother" to Willie, Jr. 5. Willie, Jr. was scheduled to enter an alternative school upon his release from the institution, with Maddie given the task of monitoring his progress by going to the school weekly and meeting with his counselor and teachers.

This plan acknowledged Willie, Sr.'s connection to his criminal family, restructured the pro-social maternal supervision so that loyalty conflicts between husband and wife were avoided and the parental dyad further reconsolidated, provided the father with a role of which he was capable (that of "gate-keeper"), and allowed for Willie, Jr. a connection, and thereby, an identification, with the father's family.

## Conclusion

As Spinoza, the 17th century Dutch philosopher once pointed out in his writings on the power and unity of nature, **perhaps it is better to dwell not on human infirmity but on human virtue and**

**how to perfect it** (Kraemer, 1982). Human beings organize themselves into families. The relationships which family organization produces are among the most powerful and unifying of all human relationships. As the social context of the family changes, so does its structure and function; yet the relationships within the new structure are nonetheless meaningful, albeit changed. **To bemoan the destruction of the nuclear family is to only affirm a problem. To celebrate the resiliency of the family and validate its adaptability to changing conditions is to create the atmosphere for the "reattachment" to family which Empey sees as part of the solution to modern-day delinquency.** To work with families and to create and re-create attachments which serve to unify family bonds and functionality—whether they be nuclear, single-parent, or "blended" families—is to combat anonymity and narcissism and reaffirm an ethic of love, caring, and relational responsibility.

**References**


*Bateson, Gregory.* **Mind and Nature, A Necessary Unity.** *New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979.*

*Bateson, Mary Catherine. "We are the World, We are the Parents."* **The Family Therapy Networker** *9(5), (September-October 1985): pp. 42-45.*

*Dell, Paul and Goolishan, Harry. "Order Through Fluctuation." Paper presented at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the A.K. Rice Institute, Houston, Texas, 1979.*

*Elder, Glen and Runck, Bette. "Families in Hard Times: A Legacy."* **Families Today** *Vol. 1, NIMH Science Monographs 1 (Library of Congress Catalog number 79-689761, 1979, p. 492.*

*Goldstein, Harris S. "Parental Composition, Supervision, and Conduct Problems in Youths 12-17 Years Old."* **Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry** *23(6), (1984): pp. 679-694.*

*Hoffman, Lynn. "Breaking the Homeostatic Cycle." In* **Family Therapy: Theory and Practice.** *Edited by Philip Guerin. New York: Gardner Press, 1984.*

*Hoffman, Lynn.* **Foundations of Family Therapy.** *New York: Basic Books, 1981.*

*Holman, Adele.* **Family Assessment: Tools for Understanding and Intervention.** *Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1983.*

*Kraemer, Sebastian. "A Note on Spinoza's Contribution to Systemic Therapy."* **Family Process** *21(3), (September 1982): pp. 353-357.*

*McHarg, Ian L.* **Design with Nature**. *Garden City, New York: Doubleday Natural History Press, 1971.*

*Nichols, Michael P.* **Family Therapy: Concepts and Methods**. *New York: Gardner Press, 1984.*

*Papp, Peggy.* **The Process of Change**. *New York: Guildford Press, 1983.*

*Robins, Lee and Yahraes, Herbert. "Antisocial Children as Adults."* **Families Today**. *Vol. II, NIMH Science Monograph 1 (Library of Congress Catalog Number 79-667-976), 1979, p. 492.*

*Sager, Clifford, et. al.* **Treating the Remarried Family**. *New York: Brunner-Mazel, 1983.*

*Sears, Paul B.* **The Ecology of Man**. *Condon Lectures, University of Oregon Press, 1957.*

*Walz, Thomas and Miller, Pamela. "The Family of the Future: Public Policy Considerations." (Unpublished paper) School of Social Work, University of Iowa, 1983.*

*Weltner, John S. "A Structural Approach to the Single-Parent Family."* **Family Process** *21(2), (June 1982): pp. 203-210.*

## Notes on Contributors

**LaMar T. Empey** is an accomplished scholar and student of crime and delinquency. Among his best known writings are *American Delinquency: Its Meaning and Construction*; *The Silverlake Experiment* (with Steven Lubeck); *The Provo Experiment* (with Maynard Erickson); and *Explaining Delinquency* (with Steven Lubeck). Dr. Empey is retired from the University of Southern California where he served as Chairman of the Sociology Department and Director of the Youth Studies Center. Dr. Empey received his bachelors and masters degrees from Brigham Young University and his Ph.D. from Washington State University. He is currently living, working, and writing in Cody, Wyoming.

**Maurice B. Cohill, Jr.** is chief judge of the U.S. District Court, Western District of Pennsylvania. Prior to his assignment to the federal judiciary in 1976, Judge Cohill served on the Court of Common Pleas, Juvenile Division in Allegheny County (Pittsburgh), Pennsylvania for eleven years. Judge Cohill received a bachelors degree from Princeton University and his law degree from the University of Pittsburgh.

**Judith Cassetty** is Special Assistant for Child Support Evaluation, Planning and Research Division, Office of the Attorney General for the state of Texas. Her research grants have focused on: cash transfer programs, health care, education, and child support enforcement. She has authored many articles and the book *Child Support and Public Policy: Securing Support from Absent Fathers of Dependent Children*. Dr. Cassetty received a bachelors degree from Vanderbilt University, a masters degree from the University of Tennessee and a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

**Leah S. Taylor** is an independent human resources consultant and a private family therapist in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. She has received contracts from both public and private treatment agencies to provide services in organizational development, program planning, management effectiveness, and staff training. Dr. Taylor received a bachelors degree from Oberlin College, a masters degree from San Francisco University and a Ph.D. in Social-Clinical Psychology from the Wright Institute, Berkeley, California.